

QUEER STORIES

from Truth

3rd Series

(Yellow)

By

E. C. GRENVILLE
MURRAY.



LONDON.

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CONTENTS.



	PAGE
I. BROTHER HILARIUS, THE ORGANIST	I
II. THE BLACK DIAMOND	14
III. A COCK'S KERMESSE	26
IV. AUNT PRUE'S KINDNESS	39
V. A WEDDING AMONG THE BEANS	52
VI. A TALE OF THE "CAT"	68
VII. THE SCOUT'S DAUGHTER	85
VIII. A JERSEY ROSE	97
IX. HOW HAGGAI SLEW A PARROT	109
X. THE SHE-EPICURE	124
XI. THE SHOPLIFTER	137
XII. OLD BARBLE'S HOUSE,	154
XIII. THE SHEEP TURNED LION	166

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from **Truth.**

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QUEER STORIES.



I.

BROTHER HILARIUS, THE ORGANIST.

BROTHER AMBROSE and Brother Anthony—in civil life the Rev. Messrs. Brown and Jones—were deacons of the Church of England, who had followed the prevailing fashion of quarrelling with their bishops on a point of law connected with Ritualist practices, and had metaphorically gone into the wilderness to set up a hermitage. They had shaken the dust of the establishment off their shoes, and had shaken off the shoes at the same time as the dust, in order to don sandals. A patch on the summit of their pates was shaven; they wore gray baize gowns like Ulster coats, and they celebrated Mass; yet they professed to be still within the Anglican communion, because it would have been inconvenient

to them to submit to the discipline of the Roman Church. They were young gentlemen who liked to be their own bishops and popes, and to give themselves out as the only depositaries of true faith and ritual. They had no connection with any other place of business—I mean with any other convents but the two which they themselves had instituted one for men, the other for women.

Their wilderness was a pretty district near a fashionable seaport town on the South coast; and their convents consisted of two picturesque houses, hired with the money of Brother Ambrose—in civil life Brown, from the uncle of Brother Anthony—in civil life Jones, who was a building contractor, and owned land in those parts. The offerings of the faithful and the dowers of divers brothers and sisters who had joined the Order, had enabled the pious founders to furnish the two houses suitably, to fit them up with cells, chapels, &c. ; but the monkery and nunnery dedicated to St. Ascetus and his sister St. Asceta, were not quite so prosperous as they might have been; so that, after much anxious cogitation, Brothers Ambrose and Anthony decided to take out licences as brewers of bitter beer.

The Carthusians and Trappists of France manufacture respectively *chartreuse* and *trappistine*, and the Benedictines of Fécamp distil a notable liqueur which bears their name, so there could be no objection to these British ascetics making bitter ale for the good of their funds and the refreshment of their contemporaries. A red label, with a picture in blue of a monk holding up a glass, or chalice, and invoking a blessing on it, was registered as a trade-mark, and Brother Anthony's uncle, the building contractor, made himself useful in issuing advertisements and acting as traveller for the reverend firm. One is happy to say that the trade of the good ascetics soon thrived apace; insomuch that Brothers Ambrose and Anthony had to divide between them the administration of their convents. When persons came to seek spiritual consolation, they were referred to Brother Ambrose; when they called to buy beer they were requested to turn to the left and enter the office of Brother Anthony. Brother Ambrose sat in his oratory with a missal in his hand, and a crucifix at his waist; Brother Anthony sat at a high desk with a ledger before him, and sample-bottles of his beer in imperial pints, quarts,

magnums and jereboams ; and there hung from his girdle a corkscrew. But both friars wrought on the same ground to this extent, that when a customer had paid for his beer, Brother Anthony would talk to him about his soul, and hear his confession if he desired it ; while Brother Ambrose, when he had shriven a penitent, never failed to slip into his hand a price-list calling attention to the exceptionally reasonable prices of the ascetic beer, which could be bought on the premises, or sent neatly packed and carriage prepaid to any part of the kingdom. As for the minor brothers and sisters of the Order, they all laboured earnestly in the same cause : for the men acted as brewers, bottlers, or corkers, and the nuns, when not engaged in devotional exercises, pasted labels on the bottles, did the packing, and posted circulars to licensed victuallers. Thus by uniting their efforts and paying close attention to the quality of their malt and hops, the members of the fraternity soon got for their beer the name of a very good beverage indeed, and they became additionally blessed with the fruits of increase by a strict adherence to the system of cash payments on delivery.

As their worldly affairs began to shine the

ascetics grew anxious that there should be no shortcomings in their spiritual ministrations. They built a new chapel for the common use of the monks and nuns; invested largely in gaudy chasubles, robes, stoles, and candlesticks, and strove by the brilliancy of their Sunday and Saints'-day services to attract crowds from the fashionable bathing resort near which they resided. They also were very sedulous about their music and choir, and were so lucky as to find a capital tenor and baritone among the friars, and a very fair soprano and contralto among the nuns. Unfortunately they had no organist, nor a bass worth the name, and this displeased Brother Ambrose, who did not like to retain the services of his paid organist. He had found it a good principle to pay out as little money as possible from the convent, and to get in all he could. Had he been able to find an organist who would have devoted his talents to the Order for nothing, he would have prayed benedictions on that man, and held out to him a sure hope of remuneration in a better world; but the hireling organist was so little touched with the spirit of grace that he would not even consent to be requited with bottled

beer, and was mercenary enough to insist always on cheques payable to bearer. Every time Brother Ambrose signed one of these documents, he uttered a groan, saying: "This really must cease. It does not look reputable to have salaried servants. One would think the Order of St. Ascetus was powerless to attract men of talent." And it became the hope of his life that some day a postulant might turn up, endowed with the musical gifts whereof the other friars, and all the sisters, strange to say, were deficient.

One day, when Brother Ambrose happened to be unusually sore at signing his quarterly cheque, seeing that the same had been received by the caitiff organist with a demand for a rise in his wages, he saw Brother Anthony come hastily towards his oratory, bringing with him a tall, burly fellow in the Sunday attire of a mechanic, whose cheeks were as red as steaks and whose round gray eyes jutted out from his head like prize gooseberries. He looked a little sheepish at that moment and waddled in his gait, so that Brother Anthony, who was walking fast, stepped into the oratory two good lengths ahead of him, and cried in a loud whisper to Ambrose: "Eureka! an organist!"

“That?” exclaimed Brother Ambrose, who had thought the big man must be a butcher, who had come to say that he could not go on supplying the convent with joints on the usual terms, or something unpleasant of that sort.

“Yes; and he’s a ‘bass,’ too; just you try him,” said Brother Anthony, making an acoustic horn of his hand. “His name is Knuckbowne.”

Here the form of Mr. Knuckbowne darkened the doorway, and Brother Ambrose glided forward with an unctuous smile to greet him. Brother Anthony retired. Then there was a moment of awkward silence. Mr. Knuckbowne looked uneasy, like a man who is going to ask for a small loan. Suddenly he raised his eyes from the floor and said in a stentorian voice, which made the window-panes jingle;—“Sir, I’m a miserable sinner.” The word which he actually used was not “miserable,” but accursed, and began with a D, but there is no need to repeat it here.

“Call me ‘Brother,’” said Ambrose, mildly “We are all brethren here. You can sing, can you not?”

“Ay,” said Mr. Knuckbowne, in a sullen sort of way, as if his accomplishment recalled bitter

memories. "I've been a sailor, and I've sung on the foc'sle at nights so that the captain could hear me in his cabin, and used to pass the word to the Marine at his door to go and ask what all that bellowing was about; and I've been a sodger, and sung at free-and-easies so that the perlice would come rushing up from t'other end of the street to know what was up." .

"Dear me! a chequered career!" exclaimed Brother Ambrose with surprise.

"And I've been a pitman," continued Mr. Knuckbowne, stolidly, in a bawling tone. "And you'd no need of a signal bell at the bottom of a shaft when I was there, for I'd only to hollar: 'Hoy, there!'" (here Mr. K. gave a howl which forced the Brother to plug both his ears with his forefingers in a fright) "and the cage had come rattling down in no time; and I've been a comic singer, and sang 'Tom Bowling,' not to mention other things, at penny gaffs, till what between the people who rushed in at the doors to hear me, and those who wanted to bolt out, saying I deafened them, there used to be a row at the entrance every night." . . "Dear me, dear me!" repeated Brother Ambrose; "and pray what might a penny gaff be?"

“ Well, a gaff’s a music-hall in a kind o’ way,” said Mr. Knuckbowne sadly ; “ and it was at one of those places that I was collared one night for being drunk and disorderly and assaulting the perlice. The beaks gave me six weeks’ hard labour, without the option of a fine.”

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated Brother Ambrose compassionately, like a physician who sees a sore exposed. “ And—and, you are an organist, I believe ? ”

“ I’m the son of an organist, and bred an organist myself,” answered Mr. Knuckbowne. “ I used to strum away in our parish church o’ Sundays when I was no higher than two quart pots placed one on top o’ t’other, and when I was in quod I used to play t’organ in the prison chapel, so that one day the chaplain says to me, ‘ Knuckbowne,’ says he, ‘ a religious life is the thing for you. You’ve gone wrong ’cos o’ the world’s temptations. Just you go and call on my friend, Mr. Brown, at the Monastery of St. Ascetus, and he’ll set you on the straight road that leads to the ’appy land.’ And so here I am,” concluded Mr. Knuckbowne, passing his sleeve over his eyes, and emitting a snivel.

“ My dear, de-ar friend ! ” said Brother

Ambrose, gently touched and advancing towards him with hands extended, "it is for recovered sheep like you that our monastery has been founded. You will find us all brethren, ready to treat you like one of ourselves."

"Yes, you seem good sort o' chaps," replied Mr. Knuckbowne pensively; "and that bitter beer o' yourn is the best I've ever tasted."

* * * * *

Soon afterwards Mr. Knuckbowne was duly installed as a novice in the monastery, under the name of Brother Hilarius; and about six months after his admission, when he had had sufficient practice at the organ and with the choir, his fame as a player and singer began to spread far and wide. His bass voice was compared with that of the late Signor Lablache. It was not only loud and pure, having notes like those of a cavalry trumpet, but it could compass the whole octave without effort—now deep as a trombone, now exquisite in its modulations as a well-toned flute. The crowds who came to attend the monastic services, went away much impressed by the new monk's grand rendering of the Gregorian chants; and they were not less pleased by his performances on

the organ. Brother Hilarius was not one of those players who revel in difficult variations—but how clearly he brought out a tune; and what a rousing effect the big organ had when he brought down his broad fingers on its keyboard, seeming to splash out music in a bold, brilliant spray. Moreover, Brother Hilarius looked mighty well in his conventual garb. He was the tallest of the monks, towering above them all by a head and shoulders, and there was a majesty in his massive stride, which made beholders think it was truly an edifying thing to see so well-favoured a man take to the privations of a religious life. Some, indeed, among those who admired him, may have wondered how any man could prosper as he did on the roots and salt fish which they imagined to be the staple of the monastic diet.

Unfortunately, though none knew this but his brother friars and superiors, Brother Hilarius did not lead an exemplary life at all. Not to put too fine a point upon it, he was continually drunk. When not musically employed, his daily task consisted in bottling beer, and, one is sorry to state, it soon became evident to the meanest observer that many bottles were

reported by Brother Hilarius as broken, when it was but too evident that the contents of them had been poured down his own throat. The Brother worked in a cellar by himself, so he could easily dissemble his tipplings, but he could not so easily dissemble the discreditable condition to which they reduced him. When merry he would joke like a pagan, and sing songs not suited to the decorum of any convent. One day Brother Ambrose felt the thing had gone too far, and sent for Hilarius. "Brother," said he sternly, "your conduct is a scandal. We are going to remove you from the beer-cellar."

"If you cut off my beer I can't sing," answered the Brother doggedly. "I'm a bird who wants his whistle wetted."

"Let me remonstrate," said Brother Ambrose. "You must surely feel that you did not come here to be drunken;" and he went on for a quarter of an hour in this strain till Hilarius got touched, wept, promised amendment, and agreed to the cutting-off of his beer.

But lo, next day and the next, and for many days after, there was no singing or playing to be got from Hilarius. He tried to sing, but

couldn't. His voice was dry and choked ; his fingers seemed stiff and awkward. He missed notes ; once he went to sleep over his keyboard in the middle of a canticle, and excused himself afterwards by saying that cold water, as a tippie, addled his understanding. Consternation spread among the monks, for already the faithful who attended the church were beginning to murmur, saying that monastic life was playing havoc with poor Hilarius, and that apparently it was too hard a thing for any man to stand. It looked as if many postulants would be deterred from embracing monkery from this fact, so something had to be done.

"What shall we do ?" asked Brother Ambrose gloomily one day of Brother Anthony. "The reputation of our monastery is in danger."

"I think," said Anthony Jesuitically, "we had better leave the key of the cellar about and close our eyes. We won't give Hilarius any beer, but if he chooses to take it . . . "

"The sin will lie on his head," answered Ambrose piously.

Since that day there has been splendid organ-playing and bass singing at the Monastery of St. Ascetus.

II.

THE BLACK DIAMOND.

It was four o'clock in the morning ; and, as Herbert Fontrey walked out of the Kursaal at Ostend, the gray dawn of an August day was breaking on the horizon and blending its light with that of a waning moon. The sea was quiet, and unfurled itself in small, noiseless waves on the beach of soft, white sand, where hundreds of bathing-machines, striped blue, red and yellow, were drawn up. Early as it was, the Digue was not deserted, for a fleet of smacks had just come in, and squads of fishermen and fisher-girls were hurrying to the market or the railway-station with baskets on their backs. Out to the right, in the direction of the port, a packet-boat was steaming off with a long trail of smoke behind it, on its way to England.

Herbert Fontrey, who had drawn up the collar of his overcoat, approached the railing of

the Digue, lit a cigar, and looked out upon the sea. He had just been cleaned out of every sixpence he possessed, and had lost on parole £1,500, which he did not possess. This was the result of a night's play at baccarat, following upon two other nights similarly employed. Herbert Fontrey had not enough money in the world now to pay his hotel bill; and as to his prospects, he was a lieutenant in a marching regiment, who had but £300 a year over and above his pay, and was never likely to get any more. His father, a retired General, would not be able to help him out of his present scrape, and he had no relatives beside his father to whom he could appeal in this emergency. He had played like a fool, and lost. Why? Because he had wished to show off in the company of men richer than himself. There was, perhaps, a second reason flowing out of the champagne he had drunk at a series of festive dinners with a few fools like himself and one or two knaves.

Of course Herbert Fontrey now thought of suicide. When a man has made this world too hot to hold him he dreams naturally of a cool, snug bed underground, where he is not likely to be dunned, nor to wince under the sneers of

men who accuse him of having cheated them. It was a question for Fontrey between death and dishonour. If he did not pay £1,500 before night he would be posted in the card-room of the Kursaal as a defaulter; he would have to throw up his commission and renounce all idea of returning to England. As his eyes watched the Ostend packet fast vanishing into a speck, he mused with poignant bitterness that he had seen his last of the land to which it was going, and of all who were dear to him in that land.

“I wonder what poor little Minnie will say,” he exclaimed to himself half aloud. He was thinking of the daughter of the Major in his regiment—a soft-hearted little thing who loved him. Till now he had made light of her love, reflecting that matrimony was out of the question to a man of his limited means; but he did not make light of Minnie’s love now

What soft reproach there had been in her glance when he had parted from her a few days before! He had certainly been flirting with her, and had caught her heart, fast imprisoned. Her timid glance and the trembling of her hand as she murmured “Good-bye” seemed to say as much; and maybe she had cried a good deal

since because he had not given her one word of hope as he left her. Well, she was avenged now, for if he had plighted his troth to her, his engagement would have sufficed to keep him straight; whereas now there was not a human being on earth in a worse condition than he, self-condemned to death. A pull of a trigger, and there would be an end of him. Presently he should be weltering on the floor of his hotel-bedroom, and his suicide would be the talk of Ostend for a day or two, not more. "And I wonder what Minnie will think of it," he repeated, with a forced smile.

He threw his cigar away; it tasted bitter. Dawn was spreading now, and there were some saffron tints on the horizon line, heralding the sun's coming. Fontrey leaned on the railing, and in a dreamy way, like a man who has nothing to do, waited for the sun to rise. As it emerged slowly behind the sea, it covered all the waters with gold, and the sky above became one vast vault of blue without a cloud in it. A glorious morning had arisen.

It was six o'clock now, and Herbert Fontrey, shaking himself out of his reverie, turned to go back to his hotel. He walked erect, for he was

strong; and nothing in his gait denoted that he was fatigued by the emotions of the sleepless night that had ruined him. He looked, in fact, so robust and full of life, that his appearance excited the pathetic envy of a dying invalid who was being wheeled about the Digue in a Bath-chair, trying to inhale a little sustenance into his lungs from the tonic air of the morning.

This invalid—a young man scarcely twenty-five—was one of the wealthiest persons in Europe. He went by the name of Count de Citramont, but was a Prince of blood Royal, belonging to a deposed dynasty. Of weakly constitution, he had overdone himself by fast living, for which he had never felt any real inclination, and now that he knew he was doomed to die, he looked back upon his life as a rather bad joke, which he had no great wish to see prolonged. He was slightly acquainted with Fontrey, having met him on racecourses, and so addressed him:

“Good morning, Mr. Fontrey! I did not know you were such an early riser.”

“Good morning, Prince,” said Herbert, bowing. “I hope your health is better.”

“Thanks, yes; I am near cure now—a final

cure," answered the Prince with a faint smile. "Is there any message I can carry for you into the next world?"

"I shall perhaps be there before you," replied Fontrey, in a tone which the invalid mistook for banter, for a laugh had accompanied the words. Dying men are never sorry to be reminded of the freaks of fate by which the strong are often struck down before the weak; and if Herbert had wished to pay his court to the moribund Prince he could not have proceeded more adroitly. He had turned and was walking beside the Bath-chair which was being pushed by a servant in black. There was an equerry on the off-side, but he did not join in the conversation, being one of those well-trained courtiers who only give signs of life when spoken to. Presently the Bath-chair stopped at the bend of the Digue just outside the Kursaal, and the equerry withdrew discreetly out of earshot. He did not understand English, and this may have had something to do with his courtesy.

The Prince shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed out on the sea. No sigh escaped him, for he really did not regret the life that

was fast ebbing from him ; and Nature's beauties brought back no touching memories to his mind. They were simply pretty pictures which he admired. He began to talk of fishing, and of the perils which sailors face on stormy nights. Fontrey let him talk, and answered occasionally by assenting monosyllables ; but he himself originated no remarks. A sudden flush had mounted to his cheeks, and there was a nervous expression in his looks as he eyed the Prince with an intent scrutiny. The truth is, it had just occurred to him that this dying lad who was so great and wealthy might, by the stroke of a pen, save him from death and ignominy, and open before him a new career full of hope—not a gambler's career, but a happy wedded life with Minnie.

He hesitated a moment, then speaking fast, to make retreat impossible : “ Prince, it was perhaps Providence that threw me in your way this morning. I was going home to commit suicide.”

“ Bah ! ” said the Prince, arching his eyes in amusement. “ Losses at cards ? ”

“ Yes, I have lost fifteen hundred pounds which I cannot pay. Can you—will you lend

me that sum? I do not know how long it may be before I shall be in a position to repay you, but I swear to discharge my debt some day, if I live."

"My dear fellow, I don't believe I am worth a five-pound note," answered the Prince, rather dryly. "My death is being discounted, and my friends have taken possession of all my effects. If I wrote you a cheque, they would ask you to return it on the plea that I am not capable of managing my own affairs."

"Forgive me for having troubled you, then," said Fontrey, with a gulp at the throat. "It was my last hope."

"Oh, no, a man like you mustn't despair because the cards have gone against him for once." As he said this, however, the Prince looked at Fontrey and saw that the man had really, to use a gambler's phrase, been hard "hit." He stroked his fair moustache for a moment with a hand white and small as a child's, and a wretched expression of helplessness came over his features. Then his eye fell upon a ring he was wearing — a very large black diamond set within a circle of brilliants — a trinket of great price. Abruptly he made a

sign to the servant behind his chair to retire, and glancing round timidly to see that he was not watched, slipped off the ring and thrust it into Fontrey's hand. "There, don't look at it," he whispered, "that servant didn't understand what you said. I believe the diamond is worth thousands of pounds; you can go to Brussels to-day and raise money on it, but don't tell a soul here of the matter."

"But, Prince, I don't like to accept such a loan," stammered Fontrey, who had reddened deeply.

"I can't lend you money," said the Prince, "and I shall soon be past caring for rings, so that you need have no scruples. The ring is mine; it has been three hundred years in our family. There now, my equerry is coming back. Good morning, and better luck to you."

He shook his head to intimate to Fontrey that the latter must not say another word, then let his head fall back on his pillow as he drew on a gray glove to conceal that his ring was gone. Fontrey lifted his hat and left him; but his step was rather unsteady as he went, and a mist seemed to have risen out at sea.

* * * * *

A week later Count de Citramont was seated on the terrace of the Kursaal in the afternoon, listening to the music of the band. It was bright, warm weather, that would have revived any invalid who could be revived; but the Prince seemed weaker and more languid than ever, though he strove to look cheerful. He responded with an inclination of the head, sometimes with a smile, to the numerous salutations bestowed on him by persons who were aware of his rank, but when he had touched the brim of his hat his hand always dropped with fatigue on to the arm of his chair, where his fingers listlessly beat time with the music.

The concert was drawing to an end, when all at once the Prince's features were lit up by a rosy flush. Herbert Fontrey had just walked on to the terrace with two friends, the one an old gentleman of military bearing, the other a pretty, sweet-faced girl, who hung on his arm. Fontrey made straight for the invalid's chair, and said, with emotion: "Prince, may I have the honour of presenting to you my intended wife—Miss Elmsdale?"

"Miss Elmsdale, I am so glad," said the Prince, with a graceful bow, as he held out his

hand, and he motioned to her to take the seat beside him. Minnie's eyes were full of tears, and the Prince saw that she wished to say something to him. She held between her fingers something that sparkled—his ring.

"Prince, Herbert has told us all about your generosity," she faltered; "my father knows about it, and oh! we are so grateful to you! I have brought you back your ring."

"You had no use for it, then?" said the Prince, addressing Fontrey.

"It saved me," answered the latter in a low, contrite voice. "I raised two thousand pounds on it at Brussels, and coming back to the Bac. table I won back in one night all I had lost and five hundred pounds over."

"And he is never going to gamble again—never," interposed Minnie, artlessly

"Are you quite sure of that?" asked the Prince with a smile.

"Oh, he has promised," said Minnie, as if her betrothed's word was better than a sealed bond.

"Well, then, give me your hand, Miss Elmsdale," whispered the Prince. "There; let this ring which I place on your finger be my

wedding gift to you ; and let it remind Fontrey, whenever he sees it, of his promise.”

* * * * *

A few weeks afterwards there was a pompous funeral service in the cathedral of a German capital. It was a grand pageant, but among the crowd of indifferent courtiers who attended the ceremony there was but one genuine mourner—an officer in English uniform, who looked sad as if he had lost a brother.

III.

A COCK'S KERMESE.

THE Kermesses of Belgian cities are kinds of Carnivals held during the summer months. Each city celebrates its own in a manner peculiar to itself, generally converting the holiday into an occasion for commemorating some great event in local history. At Brussels the Kermesse was once splendid ; but since the capital has grown to the proportions of a small Paris it has declined. Some sturdy Brabantines, however, still keep up the patriotic custom of dressing themselves in fancy costume, and masquerading processionally through the streets in honour of Counts Egmont and Horn, who lost their heads in the market-place of Brussels some three centuries ago. Now, among the Brusselers who do this, none ever threw more zeal into the celebration than Hermann van Kostarde, a young and promising painter, who, being addicted to a very lugubrious

style of art—pictures of battles, executions, torturings, and such like—was, almost as a matter of course, a very gay dog in private life.

Hermann van Kostarde had passed through that phase of Bohemianism which forms the apprenticeship of an artistic career; and it had taken him some years of very hard work before he had earned enough to purchase the pretty villa at Laeken, where he lived a life of single blessedness with his easel, his dog, and his old servant Lisbeth. But in becoming prosperous Hermann had not discarded the blithesome tastes which had procured for him a name as the jolliest of boon companions in his old days of studentship at the University of Louvain; and every year at the Kermesse he made it his practice to assume a fanciful disguise, including a mask, and to rush about the streets performing antics which convulsed the public with laughter. Certain it is that his extraordinary gambols deserved the general recognition they obtained, for you would have thought there was a devil in the wiry young Brabantine, whose arms, legs, and tongue all worked together, till, by dint of turning somersaults, dancing on his head, and

yelling songs, he tired himself out, and returned home happy. Among the travesties which our facetious artist had assumed to the general satisfaction were those of a bear, a bishop, a baboon, Bismarck, and a nun. This last fancy of his had procured him the unexpected sensation of being collared by a policeman, and marched off to the station on a charge of wearing a disguise calculated to bring religious corporations into contempt—a charge which was, however, politely dismissed when the commissaire had ascertained who the culprit was.

Now this year Hermann van Kostarde thought that he would dress himself up as a barn-door cock; and he ordered a complete suit of wire, wicker-work, and feathers to this effect from a noted costumier. The disguise was at once rich, ingenious, and costly; and it excited the wonder and indignation of old Lisbeth, who was in her master's studio when it arrived. This venerable servant had what Hermann called the most even of tempers, for she was always cross. So sour-featured and grumpy was she, that the artist used to make her sit to him for the figures of sorceresses and cruel old hags, which he introduced into his pictures. But he

loved her all the same, for she kept his house straight, cooked him strangely good dinners, and was attached to him after a crooked fashion of her own.

"Now sit still, and remember that you are posturing for the old she-heathen who is bastarding St. Lawrence on his gridiron," exclaimed Hermann, as he saw Lisbeth's face crinkle up at sight of the disguise. "Now, what have you to say against my costume? Isn't this a free country, and mayn't I dress up as a barn-door fowl?"

"I suppose it's that chit of a girl next door who has put this foolish notion into your head?" grumbled old Lisbeth. "She'll do better to mend the holes in her father's clothes, instead of pushing you to waste money in making a guy of yourself."

"You seem to have taken a grip against Mdlle. Rose Deschamps," answered Hermann, as he dipped the brush in the vermilion on his palette. "She's a very good girl, who takes great care of her father."

"Likely enough you think her a good girl, since she is always casting sheep's eyes at you," was Lisbeth's ungracious retort. It made

Hermann laugh, as he sketched an extra crow's-foot under an eye of the old she-heathen in his picture.

"What do you mean by that malicious insinuation?" he asked.

"Why, I am not the first who has made it. Everybody knows that the girl is setting her madcap at you. It would just suit her father, that shabby half-pay captain, to find a son-in-law of your sort who is rising in the world, and could give him money to spend on faro and tobacco."

"Well, you can make your mind quite easy, for I am not a marrying man," said Hermann carelessly. "And now I think that's enough work for to-day. You can go and see to the dinner."

He laid down his mahlstick and got up to examine his cock's disguise. Just at this moment he perceived, through the window, the lovely figure of a girl, walking in the garden next his with a lame old gentleman on her arm. Captain Deschamps and his daughter were the only occupants of the house that adjoined Hermann van Kostarde's, and the old officer was by no means the tatterdemalion and toper that Lisbeth

hinted, but a worthy veteran who had long served with distinction in the garrison towns of Leopold's kingdom—the only form of service open to Belgians ; and who, though he had never faced any other fire than that of his own cigars, was much respected for his presumed martial qualities by all who knew him. As for Mdlle. Rose, she was simply excellent—a frank-hearted, blue-eyed maiden, tender as a child and rational as a woman. Hermann lived on very good terms with his neighbours, and seeing Rose Deschamps, the idea occurred to him of going to exhibit himself to her in his travesty. But to do this the assistance of Lisbeth was needed. The old woman always did as she was ordered, only she frowned and growled sorely as she helped her master to adjust the rather complicated materials of his dress, which the wearer could neither put on nor take off by himself. There was a pair of boots shaped like the talons of a cock, tall leggings made of leather covered with russet feathers, and the upper part of the disguise consisted of a wicker apparatus of head, neck, wings, and tail, all thickly overlaid with plumes. Two eye-holes pierced in the breast of the fowl enabled the wearer to see.

When Hermann van Kostarde was accoutred in this queer disguise, his bull-dog Bismarck ran frightened behind an ottoman and snarled, while Lisbeth shrugged her shoulders, exclaiming: "Mon Dieu, quelle folie!"

Hermann, however, was overjoyed. "Ugh, how light I feel!" cried he, kicking his legs aloft. "We shall have prime fun to-morrow;" and, running down stairs, he crossed his garden, taking consequential struts like the autocrat of the dunghill, and shrieking in imitation of that fowl's language: "Cock-a-doodle-doo-ooh-ooh!"

"Oh dear, Monsieur Hermann, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Rose, running away from the hedge with a slight scream, as the artist approached the boundary and craned his neck over it.

"Well, you've got a good disguise this time, my friend," laughed the old Captain, amused. "Do you mean to run about Brussels in that shape?"

"Yes, I don't think there'll be many disguises as good," replied Hermann. "What does Mademoiselle Rose say?"

"Oh, it's very well for those who like that kind of thing," answered Rose, rather dryly.

Perhaps girls do not much relish seeing men whom they admire make ridiculous objects of themselves ; and it may have been true that Rose admired Hermann van Kostarde just a little.

"I am sorry my disguise does not please you," observed the artist, somewhat gloomily.

"Oh, I think it charming," said Rose, changing her tone, for she was too kind to put her father's friend out of conceit with his amusement.

"And will you come to see me dance about the streets?" inquired the sham cock.

"Oh yes, papa and I will come."

This put Hermann in a good humour again, and he scurried back indoors. "I say, though, I shall want a commissionaire to go about with me to-morrow," he remarked to Lisbeth as she helped to unstrap him. "I can't take off all this alone, and I must have some one by me, when I go into *cafés* for refreshments. Mind you hire an intelligent commissionaire. Tell him he shall have twenty francs for his day."

"Very well, sir ; I'll hire a man of sense!" said Lisbeth, ungraciously enough. "Nothing less is wanted to look after an overgrown baby."

* * * * *

The next day the sun shone brilliantly over Brussels, and the fine weather drew countless thousands into the streets to witness the cavalcades of mummies. Towards five in the afternoon a large crowd of holiday folks might have been seen massed on the Place de la Monnaie, where they had halted to watch the high jinks of a cock who was disporting himself as no bird of that feather ever did in real life. A commissionaire stood near him guffawing with laughter, and a sad-looking bull-dog waited hard by in speechless disgust, as if he had grown ashamed of the human race. All the crowd, however, including a pack of yelling boys and girls, joined in the commissionaire's mirth, and at every new gambol of the cock chorussed: "Bravo! do it again!" They were quite delighted with the bird, and many were the offers pressed upon it to come and have a glass of faro, lambie, or anything else it pleased.

But Hermann van Kostarde had had enough of this fun. He had been on his legs more than five hours; he had been hustled not a little, had lost many feathers out of his tail, had had all sorts of undesirable things, such as cigars, lucifer-matches, and small coins thrust into his

beak ; and, on the whole, he felt tired and thirsty. Taking advantage of an opportune opening made in the crowd by the passing of a carriage, he slipped through it, and, darting up a side street, made for a *café*. His disgusted yet faithful Bismarck followed him ; but in the rush through the crowd his commissionaire lost sight of him, and Hermann found himself alone.

“Now that’s awkward,” soliloquised he ; “for I shall have to ask the people in the *café* to unstrap me, and perhaps they won’t, just for fun. Anyhow, here goes ; I’m dying for a drink of water.” And he boldly entered the *café*.

His appearance caused an explosion of hilarity. The customers scrambled up from their chairs to inspect him ; the waiters mounted on tables to get a better view ; some glasses were overturned in the scrimmage, and the *dame du comptoir*, bowing her head on her marble counter, giggled till the tears ran out of her eyes.

Judge, however, of the effect that was produced on the assemblage when a plaintive voice was heard issuing from the cock, and saying : “Will somebody please unstrap me ? I am parched with thirst, and can’t drink through my beak.”

"He can't drink through his beak," echoed the nearest hearers, amid roars of laughter, and a number of humorous proposals were forthwith shouted: "Just try." "Waiter, bring a jug of beer to refresh the bird." "Waiter, fetch a funnel, too, to pour it down his beak," and so forth, all of which were accompanied by much unseemly jesting about the cock's legs, his moulting tail, and his tired-looking wings.

"Well, but I assure you I'm in earnest," moaned Hermann, whose voice, coming through the wicker cage, had an unearthly sound, and finding that the waiters would not obey him, he angrily stamped his talons. This was the very worst thing he could have done, for the people in the *café*, perceiving he was out of temper, proceeded with malicious glee to get a rise out of him. One customer led the game by pulling a whole handful of feathers out of his tail, another jumped on his back, a third shoved him, a fourth tripped him up; finally, a gay roysterer, catching him by the neck, forced his beak open and poured two quarts of beer into it; all of which, of course, flowed on to his head.

"Scoundrels! inhuman fiends!" gasped poor Hermann van Kostarde, as, drenched and dis-

comfited, he beat his retreat from the *café*; but when he was in the street he groaned in dismay: "It's no use going into another *café*, for I shall get the same treatment everywhere. Whatever shall I do? Laeken is five miles off, and I can't get a cab! Besides, I've given Lisbeth leave to go and see her friends, and she won't be back till midnight, so there'll be nobody to open the door for me, and I can't open it myself with my arms imprisoned; oh! oh!"

To make matters worse, the sky, which had been overcast for the last half-hour, began to pour down a thick drizzle of cold rain.

* * * * *

About three hours later, Captain Deschamps and his daughter, returning home after dining with some friends, stumbled upon the figure of a miserable, disconsolate, and dripping cock, standing at their gate, with Bismarck beside him.

"It's I," faltered poor Hermann, between two bad sneezes, for he had caught a fearful cold. "Please let me in; I can't get into my own house; and some wretched street boys have been pelting me with mud."

"Oh, Monsieur Hermann!" exclaimed Rose, quite concerned, as she clasped her hands.

"He's not hurt, my dear," laughed the old Captain, thinking the whole thing was a joke.

"Oh, but he is, papa; I can tell it by his voice," said Rose in a flutter, as she opened the door. "Come in, M. Hermann. Dear me, you are wet through, and must be half-dead with cold."

Hermann's only answer was a series of piteous sneezes. He was, in truth, in such a sorry plight that he had to be put to bed at once in the Captain's room; and there his old servant Lisbeth found him next morning when she was summoned.

"Ah! well, sir, I hope you enjoyed your kermesse," she said drily, as she approached the bed, shaking her head in solemn reproof.

"Yes," said Hermann with a shy laugh, "but I think it will be my last. By this time next year I hope to be a married man," and his eyes turned towards Rose Deschamps, who had just entered, blushing, with a glass of cough mixture.

IV.

AUNT PRUE'S KINDNESS.

SOMEHOW things began to go wrong in the Merrydew household from the day when Aunt Prudence came to stay there on a short visit, which lasted two years.

You see she was such an observant person, was Aunt Prue, and she took such kind interest in her niece Helen, and the latter's husband, Jack, that it was more than she could do to sit silent when she saw things going on round her with which she disapproved. And she disapproved of most things. Her sense of right and wrong was very straight, and she scorned the conventional cowardice of tolerating those social laches which she believed to be deadly sins. This does not mean that she made frequent reference to Holy Writ in her homilies, for in truth the canon law which she laid down

for the guidance of her young relatives seemed to be altogether of her own making. She would say: "I have found by experience that this or that course is foolish, and leads to mischief"; and sometimes she would add this clincher: "I wish to act kindly, and I feel it would be mistaken kindness to bequeath my fortune to persons who do not understand the science of life," meaning by these persons Jack and her niece Nell.

Here is the cat out of the bag: Aunt Prue had money, and it was the hope of being made her heirs which exercised, it must be feared, an ascendancy over the too mercenary souls of the Merrydews, husband and wife.

"If it weren't for her money, I'd kick the old canting frump out of the house," bawled Jack, losing all patience one day, about six weeks after Aunt Prue's arrival.

"Hush, dear!" exclaimed Helen, horrified. "If auntie left us, she would go back to the Moilers, who would intrigue to get us disinherited; and how silly we should look then!"

Allusions to his cousins, the Moilers, always had the effect of quieting Jack, who would have put up with a great deal from Aunt Prue

merely to spite her other nephew and niece, whom he hated. These relatives were undoubtedly angling for Aunt Prue's fortune. After harbouring the old lady in their house for three years they had, at last, offended her, and she had stamped off in a dudgeon; but since that day they had been fawning in many sycophantic ways to get her back: and it was the invariable threat of auntie, when thwarted in any of her whims, that she would return to the hospitality of these Moilers, who, judging by her description of them on these occasions, seemed to be paragons of all the virtues and graces. There came a day when even the gentle soul of Helen rebelled against the oft-repeated eulogy of the Moilers, and she said to her husband:

"Jack, I can't stand this any longer: let her cut us off with a shilling if she pleases, but I must turn her out of the house. I have had enough of being this old woman's slave."

"Hush, my dear," said Jack, taking it in his turn to play the peacemaker. "Just read this; be quick," and he produced a folded paper of legal aspect.

"Oh, Jack, it's auntie's will! Where did

you get it?" exclaimed Helen, whose breath was cut short as she read the first line.

"I found it on the table of her sitting-room; make haste and read it while the old girl is in the garden," answered Jack, who was himself much excited.

Poor Helen turned quite scarlet, and her hands trembled from nervousness as she read aloud the following words:—"I constitute my beloved niece, *Helen Merrydew*, sole heiress of all my property, personal and real—to wit, certain lands in the county of S——, yielding £2,000 a year, and a sum of forty thousand pounds invested in *Three per Cent. Consols.*, along with all my plate, jewellery, pictures, and furniture."

"Oh, Jack, how very kind!" ejaculated Helen, as she dropped her hands into her lap, and looked at her husband with brimming eyes.

"Yes, I think the old lady is worth petting," answered Jack Merrydew, refolding the will.

"How cruelly we have misjudged her!" said Helen. "I feel as if the devotion of a life-time would not be enough to pay for all this kindness."

"Well, well, she is seventy now, so I hope

our patience will not be put to the test too long," muttered Jack candidly.

"Oh, Jack, how can you talk so!" replied Helen in a scandalised tone; and from that time forth she would never hear a word uttered against Aunt Prudence. She endured all the latter's groans, lectures, and menaces with the equanimity of an angel; and Jack found all occasional tendencies on his own part towards mutiny repressed with the coldest severity.

He had indeed done a very bad day's work in showing his wife Aunt Prue's will. At first he was rather pleased with the consequences of his proceeding, because Helen vastly improved the domestic commissariat with a view to pleasing her generous relative's palate. She began to give excellent dinners, and allowed her husband *carte blanche* in laying in a stock of highly-priced wines. But in proportion as Helen became more subservient, so did Aunt Prue grow more exacting—not willingly, poor old lady, for, to use her own term, she was a person "of lowly taste, thankful for trifles," but then it was her maxim that people should do *their best* to please those they loved; and her standard of *best* happened to be a very high

one. So Jack soon got irritated at observing that his wife's stalled oxen were not seasoned by Aunt Prue with contentment, but with perpetual grumbles. Moreover, in her quiet way, the old lady gradually usurped complete dictatorial authority over the household.

Helen was so afraid of giving offence that whatever Aunt Prue said was promulgated as an edict against which there could be no appeal. Aunt Prue took a sudden objection to tobacco ; so Jack, after first being forbidden to smoke in the house, was told that he must not puff his cigars in the open air, because the smell of them lingered about his hair and clothes. Angered by his tyranny, Jack one day appeared at dinner with a red face, which the vigilant aunt chose to ascribe to potations, so that Helen was warned that if she did not wish to lose her husband by a stroke of apoplexy, she must absolutely forbid him to touch wine, spirits, or beer. Now Jack liked his glass, without being a toper, but he was so plaintively nagged at every time he drank stronger liquor than water, that for peace's sake he became a practical teetotaller. Enforced abstinence, however, did not improve his temper, and finding

that his home had become a purgatory, where it was sought to refine his moral nature at the expense of his creature comforts, he turned morose, and had frequent private tiffs with his wife.

"I suppose Aunt Prue will be cutting off my tea and coffee next," he grumbled one morning, after he had been softly rebuked for putting two lumps of sugar into his breakfast-cup. "I wish to goodness the old woman would draw up a dietetic table for me once and for all, that I might be like other prisoners, and know what's allowed me."

"How can you be so greedy, Jack?" answered his wife in irritation. "I'm ashamed to hear you talk like that. If Aunt Prue gives advice for your good, you ought to be grateful to follow it."

"I like that. Suppose she told you for your soul's good to leave off silk dresses?"

"She has advised me to do so; and, as you observe, I am wearing a stuff gown. I will no more indulge in frivolities of dress."

"Nor wear jewellery, I presume?"

"I will not if auntie objects to it."

"And you'd be ready to live on roots next?"

"I am sure auntie would not prescribe me a root diet unless she was persuaded that it would be for my benefit." This was Helen's dignified rejoinder.

"Ah, well, then," ejaculated Merrydew, with his hands in his pockets, "if we are to give up all the luxuries of life and content ourselves with necessities, we shall find our present income ample, and we need not hanker after Aunt Prue's fortune."

"I am not hankering after it. How dare you say such a thing?" exclaimed Helen, flushing. "If poor, dear auntie were ruined I should not abate my attentions to her one jot, but only cherish her the more for her misfortune. It is out of dutifulness that I endeavour to please her."

In making this fine profession Helen fibbed. The poor woman was, in truth, so absorbed by the prospect of her inheritance that her whole moral nature had become warped. And she had lost some of her personal attractions besides, for her brow was contracted into the frown of those who are engrossed by an *idée fixe*, and her voice had grown, turn by turn, shrill and hypocritical — hypocritical when she was in

auntie's presence, shrill when she talked to her husband. Nor was this all, for in constantly staking her hopes upon a fortune which was still out of reach, like the bird in the bush, Helen had parted with a good deal of the caution in money matters which characterises good wives and mothers. A curmudgeon as regards her own and her husband's personal expenditure, she grew to be prodigal concerning the general outlay for her household. No dishes were too good for Aunt Prue's table, no furniture too costly for her apartments. Helen actually caused a pavilion to be built in the garden, that auntie might have a summer boudoir remote from the noises of the road. Her next step was to decide that ordinary schools were not good enough for her two boys, aged nine and ten, who were fated to be rich with Aunt Prue's wealth; so she must needs send the pair of them to Eton at a cost of £400 a year. Now as Jack Merrydew's income did not exceed £600 per annum, it came to pass that one summer he had to come up to London and sell out a little invested capital in order to square his year's budget.

Unlucky trip! Jack drew £1000 from the

hands of his stockbroker, and when he held this sum he was suddenly tempted by the devil to do a strange thing. The life he had been leading for a few days at a London hotel offered such a contrast to the miserable existence he had been eking out at home, that the prospect of returning to put his neck under Aunt Prue's yoke seemed intolerable ; so that Jack resolved to accept the invitation of an old club chum and go yachting for three months in the Mediterranean. This resolution he took on the spur of the moment after a capital little dinner among cronies, and he wrote about it to his wife on these terms :

“MY DEAR HELEN,—I send you £500 ; the other £500 I keep, for I am going to enjoy myself. I want rest and relaxation. The sort of life which Aunt Prue has made me lead would kill me if prolonged. My love to the boys. My next letter will be from Alexandria, and I shall return to, let me hope, a more cheerful home by Christmas probably.—Your affectionate JACK.”

Poor Jack ! he had not calculated the effect of this blameworthy proceeding, for blameworthy

it was. Trials which can be borne by two are often too much for one, and Helen, deserted by her husband, naturally fell more completely under Aunt Prue's thralldom. She was, moreover, wounded to the quick by what she considered a loveless, unmanly act, insomuch that her aunt had no difficulty in persuading her that a man who leaves his wife to go gadding, must have some other kirtle in view. "This," said Aunt Prue emphatically, "is my experience of men." So on arriving at Alexandria after a lazy three months' cruise, Jack found a letter which had been sent him by a lawyer, and which ran to this effect:

"DEAR SIR,—I am instructed to sue you for a decree of judicial separation, in the court of Matrimonial Causes. My client's charges against you are desertion and cruelty. Will you please give me the name of your solicitor on whom I may serve the process, and oblige yours truly,
JOHN TACKLER."

"Now, confound the old woman, that's another of Aunt's kindnesses!" exclaimed Jack aghast, as he read this unexpected missive. "What

shall I do, Tom ? ” and he appealed to his chum, the owner of the yacht.

“ Do nothing,” said Tom, who knew his friend’s history “ Let the action go undefended ; that’s the only way to avoid being bespattered with mud in the Divorce Court. If you resist, your aunt’s money will be used to fight you, and you are sure to be worsted. If you’ll let things slide, your *vincula matrimonii* will be struck off, and you’ll be a free man.”

Jack, who liked Helen, did not much relish this advice, and returned homewards as soon as he could. But he was delayed by sickness on the road, and reached England about six months after leaving it. He arrived just in time to hear that the suit against him had been put down on the cause list, and that Aunt Prue was dead.

Yes, dead ; she had died suddenly after a surfeit of tea and muffins, poor lady, and the most touching fact in connection with her demise was that she had not left a penny ! She had never had a penny to leave. Her kind imagination had led her all her life to delude her relatives with tales of fancy wealth, and to keep them in good behaviour by leaving copies of

sham wills on tables, where they might be read by curious eyes. Dear, fanciful old thing! let us hope her imaginative proclivities were good-humouredly excused in another world.

Meanwhile poor Helen had to come to her husband's hotel in London with a sorrowful story of her disappointments. "And oh, Jack," sobbed she, when a reconciliation had been effected, "I am afraid you will have to pay the costs of that suit which I instituted at that wicked old woman's instigation."

"I suppose so," answered Jack, drily. "We are neither of us rich enough now to afford a divorce. And I take it for granted we must give Auntie a splendid funeral."

"I suppose so," sighed Helen; "else the world would say that we did not love the old cat. People are so wicked and untruthful!"

So Aunt Prue was buried with great pomp as a last tribute to her many kindnesses.

V.

A WEDDING AMONG THE BEANS.

THE banns had been duly published between Dan Tillard the sweep and Patty White the laundry-maid, and no objection was made, although the parson had three Sundays running earnestly requested all who might see any impediment to come forward and declare it. There was a playful remonstrance, though, from old Betty the midwife, who had often dandled Dan on her knees whilst he was teething, and to whom when in his fifth year he had made an obliging offer of marriage in recognition of some gift of apples, and there was a sort of protest, also, from "Winking" Bob, the publican, who, on the strength of a childish flirtation with Patty, put willow-leaves round his own head and his wife's too, for a joke. But Dan and Patty cared for none of these things, except by way of laughing at them broadly, till the corners

of their honest mouths touched their ears. He, Dan, was the most thriving of sweeps, with abundance of work all the year round, for coal came in cheap from Snibston and Moira, and kitchens and factories smoked all day and night. He took in some gardening jobs, too, and lent a hand at harvesting. Whenever there was a good penny to be turned, Dan turned it into his pocket, and sometimes he turned the penny into a guinea by giving timely warning to the manufacturers that their boilers were growing crystallised (which he could tell by the taste of the smoke, said he), and so saving them a bigger fee to the engineers, and a scolding when the factory inspectors went their rounds. As for Patty, she was the briskest of laundry-maids, and noted in all the parish for her skill in getting up fronts, whatever that may mean. She could go on ironing linen by the hour with her stout arms, which never tired; and at the game of hanging up the wet things on the clothes-lines, she would have given any other girl a start of a dozen shirts and beat her by six pairs of socks at the finish, so quick were her movements, and so little time did she waste in what she called "jawing." Then Patty's

morals were pure, and her manner of sending gallants "packing" was much to be commended for its effectiveness. She would cry in a hale voice: "Get yer along, yer silly!" and deal the intruder such a slap on the "chops" as could be heard right over the next field, like the thump of a rolling-pin on a cake of dough. And how she laughed to see the wight stagger, with both hands to the afflicted part, whilst his heavy shoes danced an involuntary hornpipe; it was good to hear this laugh, loud and fresh as a March breeze! Dan had felt the redoubtable weight of his sweetheart's slaps more than once, in the early days of his courting, before the sincerity of his intentions had become quite established in Patty's mind.

The prospects of the loving couple were excellent, and this was as it should be, for their savings were small, their united ages being only about forty. They were both moon-faced and light-haired Leicestershire folks, with eyes like milk-and-water, and feet whose soles formed a compromise between the square and the circle. As to their hands, we know the story of the Leicester artist, who, when employed at Rugby to paint the sign of the "Shoulder of Mutton,"

took his own left hand for a model. But Dan's fists and face were of an iron-gray tint from being so constantly in the soot, while Patty's arms, up to her dimpled elbows, were rough and red from dabbling in soapsuds. It took the girl some time to reconcile herself to the notion of marrying a sweep, for in the latter days of their engagement, if, perchance, she met Dan returning from his day's work before he had "cleaned himself," the kiss which he imprinted on her cheek left a mark as if a catharine-wheel had been pinned there, and fired off. He was a great one for kissing, Dan was; but Patty made her stipulations that in case they married he was to build a little outhouse in his garden for the purpose of changing his clothes and washing himself before he came in to tea--else, said she, it would be of no use for her to take in ironing. Dan agreed quite affably. He had no objection to the smell of starch in his abode if it was fresh, and promised not to come near the clean linen while the soot was on him; though soot, he maintained, was healthy to breathe for those who were not prejudiced against it. Patty had her own opinion about that, for the fine black dust in her sweetheart's hair made her sneeze;

but in sum, she and the sweep were a well-matched pair in age, income, and tastes, notwithstanding the soot.

The old folks had been asked for their consent to the marriage, and answered that they didn't see any harm in it, and they didn't see any hurry; "only," they added, "if you mean marrying, don't waste your time in fretting, but settle the matter out of hand." Then both they and their neighbours sent little scraps of furniture into Dan's wayside cabin. He had bought this place cheaply from the lord of the manor, who had let it before to an Irish tinker. It was black as a coal-hole, and required a vast deal of scouring before it could become habitable for a laundress. When Patty first saw it, one Sunday afternoon, she almost swooned, but the shock tailed off into a fit of laughing. She would not cross the threshold for fear of dirtying her best gown, and not even the sight of shrimps and watercresses laid out on the table beside a black teapot would induce her to relent from this resolve. Dan had to eat the shrimps by himself, when he came back later after seeing Patty home. But at the girl's second visit, about a month later, the place was transformed. The

sweep had turned in his friend Joe Tidey, the plumber, with orders to do "the right thing," whereon Joe had gone to work with whitewash and paint till every nook smelt of oil and shone with clean colouring. Dan, not knowing where to bestow himself amid so much splendour, took the opportunity of building the outhouse, and only ventured to enter his cottage when he had taken off his working clothes and tubbed. Even then he walked in on tiptoe, as if he had no business in his own house. The old furniture was next sold off to a broker, and new chairs, tables, and bedding made their appearance, escorted by a brand-new mangle, which glittered with varnish like a nobleman's plate-chest. The soft heart of Patty was touched when she saw these things. Leaning against her lover's shoulder she exclaimed, "Oh, Dan!" and he at once slipped his arm round her waist, for, as above said, he was a great one at kissing.

Well, the wedding-day came at last, in sunny, flowery June, and there was just enough of breeze to make the weathercock at St. Margaret's Church spin about, and to keep the air cool whilst it roved to gather perfume among the

bean-fields. At five o'clock, when larks and haymowers were up, Dan, who was in bed, heard a tremendous noise at his door. It was a symphony upon marrow-bones played by six sweeps of Leicester, who had come out on the Narborough-road in gaudy ribbons to salute their comrade. About the same hour some red-armed nymphs were performing a tattoo with flat-irons upon the doorstep of a house in King-street, where Job White, Patty's father, dealt in "sweetness and light," in other words, in treacle and tallow, with all such goods as grocers sell. The serenaders were made welcome at both houses, for their intentions were kinder than their music, and they had done bride and bridegroom the service of rousing them from their respective couches to prepare for the first serious business of the day—the dressing in new clothes. As the wedding was appointed to take place at nine, Dan thought he had not a moment to lose, and was fully equipped by six. At 6.30 he was drinking ale at the bar of "Winking" Bob's public to make the time pass; at 7.30 he had emptied three pints, and was standing a "go" of gin-and-bitters to the six sweeps; at 8 he had spilled some beer on his shirt-front and

run home to put on a clean one ; but at 8.30 he was pacing up and down in front of the crumbling walls of St. Margaret's, persuaded that he was already too late, and wondering how much longer he could stand the torment of his new boots, which were tight, and of his highly-starched gill-collar, which cut his ears. His father had to hold him by the coat-tails to prevent him from running off to King-street to hurry his bride. Dan had quite unconsciously paid a compliment to the sublime Society of Beefsteaks by dressing himself in their uniform : blue coat with brass buttons, white trousers and tie, to which he had added a low-crowned beaver that might have been made for John Bunyan. His hair, which had been liberally anointed with pink oil, diffused an odour of jessamine for ten paces round, and made the bridesmaids sniff pleasantly by-and-by. The bride came at last, rosy with heat and excitement, and followed by a showy troop of well-washed kinsfolk and acquaintances. Dan, whose spirits rose at this great moment, passed his elbow in front of his nose, and took off his beaver to greet Patty, who, ignorant of etiquette—simple maid !—forsook her father's arm, and

linked herself there and then to his. Patty was attired in a gown of brown silk, dotted with crimson fuchsias, and in a well-made kerchief of point lace in which her godmother was to have been married; but because it is fated that an Englishwoman's dress shall never be perfect except in her lover's eyes, she had put on a bonnet of cotton velvet of that loud, eye-stinging blue which is neither light nor dark, and had crowned it with a hump of laurustinus and China rose, which agreed neither with each other nor with anything else. The kinsfolk and friends followed, having each and all displayed similar good taste in their apparel, the older women being especially wonderful in best gowns which some had possessed more than a quarter of a century, and which they kept packed up in thyme and peppercorns most of the year. All these good people flowed through the church porch like a babbling torrent, and it was a heavy labour to get them to fill up the register before the wedding. Old Tillard, instead of giving his son's age, gave first his own, and then his wife's; and ended by plumping down on the table a certificate of vaccination for which nobody had asked. The Whites, in

their turn, would have liked to register the fact that their daughter was an only child, and had got a prize for sewing at school; and they actually did succeed in getting her surname written twice where it should only have appeared once. Meanwhile the bridesmaids were giggling at some whispered jokes cracked by Joe Tidey, the bridegroom's best man; and the parson had to administer a mild rebuke to them as he led the way into the church. He was a careworn curate with a swarm of children, and had found nothing jocular in matrimony

Dan and Patty felt a little abashed when they stood near the altar-rails under the severe eye of the clerk, who bade them take off their gloves. After they had complied by removing these ligaments with the help of their teeth, the service went on smoothly. Only once Dan whispered to his father: "Be I to say Yees?" and he wanted to declare "With all the world I thee endow," which the neighbouring landowners might have thought a strong measure. But the marriage was completed, and as there was no sham prudery amongst all this cheery company, the bride was heartily kissed in the vestry. Patty had heard that

it was the fashion for brides to cry, and had intended doing so, but forgot at the right moment. Then came more registration. Young Tillard's fingers shook a little till his father steadied his nerves by treading kindly but firmly on his toe; the bride wrote better; the parson wrote worst of all, though nobody told him so. There were no bells in the morning; but some ringers had offered to ring a gratuitous "grandsire" in the evening, and the offer had been accepted. For the present, when the fees had been paid, the procession filed out in the same order as they had come, Dan and Patty leading the way with lively steps, as if they were going to begin a dance. Outside, a throng of little sweeps were gathered, who raised a piping cheer, and Dan, waving his new beaver, roared, "Hooray!"

It was a quiet and hurried breakfast which the happy pair took at Job White's grocery-shop in King-street; for in gladsome June, when the days are long and the sun shines warm, bride and bridegroom want to be off to the country to enjoy themselves among the fields. They were to entertain their friends at eight in the evening, giving them, of course,

bacon and broad beans for the honour of the country; and meantime they set off on their day's honeymooning quite alone, except that Job White's bull-terrier "Cheeks" (who had a natural black patch over his left eye, as if he had begun fighting before entering this world) trotted at their heels and would not be induced to part company. Patty said gaily, "Let him come if he's so fond of us," but Dan thought that Cheeks was fonder of the beef sandwiches which he was carrying in a basket, out of which peeped a bottle for the day's refreshment. They went by rail to Ullesthorpe, where Dan had customers, Cheeks climbing into the third-class carriage with them; and thence they fared in a donkey-cart to Monk's Kirby, through Claybrook, the bower of Hannah More, and past High Cross, where the Roman roads meet, coming back by way of Newnham and Wibtoft, where are some patriarchal elms. They had only one day's holiday, and made the most of it, revelling in the near view of weasels and hares, and the distant needles of Coventry. And as the donkey-cart jogged along the shady country roads, the reins hanging limp on the little moke's back, while Dan, in shirt-sleeves

because of the heat, kept his arm round Patty's waist to prevent her from tumbling out when the wheels jolted in a rut—as the cart jogged, we say, with Cheeks behind it, Dan, the sweep, felt romantic, and began to indulge in day-dreams, not less than his betters do on such occasions. He would buy the good-will of old Jack Luffey, the crack sweep in Leicester, who was going to retire, and he would hire a new cottage, to which a laundry should be attached. Patty should have her coppers and drying-room, her new set of tubs, irons, and frilling-tongs, and all the gentry for miles round should send her their sheets and petticoats. These were the glorious visions which filled the minds of the loving couple, making their eyes moist, and causing their intertwined hands to tremble with a soft emotion; these the plans which Cheeks overheard as he ran behind the cart, with his tail between his legs, and his ears bent in philosophical musing. The process of laundry building in the air is an enlivening one; it anyhow makes the time pass, and so the most eventful day in Dan and Patty's life seemed to have glided by like a flower on the water, when at eight o'clock they found themselves again in

King-street, where all their hungry friends and kinsmen had assembled.

Need we say how merry was the company—how they crowded, squeezing each other and laughing, into Job White's shop-parlour, which somehow contrived to hold them all—and how they fell-to upon the fare as if they had all been whetting their teeth upon grindstones? The bacon was said to be ruled like a copy-book; the beans were tender as oysters; the mince-meat, made many months ago, had improved with age; and the beer bore the Royal Oak brand, which was enough to commend it to the palates of those who passed the brown jugs round, nudging each other, and crying, "No heel-taps!" When the cake was cut, and proved to be white outside and black within, the guests protested that both the sweep and the washer-woman had been concerned in making it; and then followed a string of pleasantries upon the contrasts between the two trades—between starch and soot, soapsuds and coal-smoke, &c. At last these jokes grew, like the beans, flat, with a tendency to become broad; so Patty threw on her homespun shawl and Dan slipped out after her into the moonlit street, which was deserted,

for the time was now close upon midnight. They had already run fifty yards before the guests could get through the door, but they still ran on, as they heard the "tinning," that is, serenading with tin pots and trays, to which the dog Cheeks added his excited barking by way of an epithalamium. And scarcely had they turned the street-corner, when this same Cheeks came racing after them with an old shoe in his mouth, one of those that had been thrown for good luck. Dan stamped his foot, and told the dog to go home, but Patty, with a more womanly belief in omens, said: "Thank you, Cheeks—good doggie," and patted him on the head.

Then the pair linked their arms, Darby-and-Joan-like, and they were not long in walking to their cottage, which some unknown friends had put in perfect order. By way of taking possession, the wife lighted a fire and set the kettle on to boil with views to a cup of tea—and here my story ends. But I may as well add, that if you would visit aright the city of Bladud's royal son, the cheese-vats of the Wel-land Valley, or the solitudes of Charnwood, then go when the beans are young. Under a well-

swept chimney hang a pot of rain-water with a pinch of soda. Take a Leicestershire maiden with you into the garden to hold her apron while you fill it with dewy beans. And if you do not meet Love between the pale-green rows of beanstalks, you must be more blind than he.

VI.

A TALE OF THE "CAT."

It was a proud moment for Private Wellington Mooney, of the 200th Metropolitan, or Poultry Corps, when his adjutant declared that he was proficient in marching drill, and might accordingly take part with his corps in the review which the Queen was going to hold at Windsor. As everybody knows, her Majesty was going to parade the might of British arms before the negro King of Caribee, whose alliance was of value to us just then.

Now, Wellington Mooney, chief clerk in the Messrs. Moneydew's counting-house, Poultry, and prospective partner in the firm, had lately thought of taking to himself a wife, and it was partly in connection with this object that he had joined the 200th Metropolitan. The every-day garb of civilians is not picturesque; but clothed in his scarlet volunteer uniform,

with a shako on his pate and a sword-bayonet dangling on his hip, Wellington M. cut a pretty gallant appearance, and he knew it. Though he was a round-faced, rather paunchy fellow of about thirty, with a tendency to baldness, he had so far contracted the martial swagger that no one seeing him strut down the Strand on a drill-day would have felt tempted to tweak him by the nose. As for his betrothed, she thought him most imposing. Her name was Miss Cicely Tott, and she was a very sentimental young lady, the daughter of a retired merchant, as he called himself, who had long kept a pudding-shop at Pie-corner.

"Well," soliloquised Wellington Mooney, as he buttoned his rather tight tunic on the day of the review, "I like these military displays. They inspire noble thoughts to the people. Foreigners, too, learn to own that we are not a nation of shopkeepers. By Jove, though, I think I must let out another hole in this belt. I shall have to give up drinking beer. I hope Cicely will manage to get a good place at the review, so as to see our corps manœuvre. Eugh! it's a little hot to-day, and this shako feels a bit heavy. Never mind. Here goes!" And

soon Private W M. might have been seen marching gaily towards the quadrangle of Somerset House, where his corps were to assemble. It was a glorious June day, and our volunteer was in high spirits from thinking that Miss Tott was going to see him march by his sovereign in all the pomp of his martial glory

Unfortunately, it so happened that when Wellington Mooney's company formed fours, this ardent warrior found himself next to a festive young coffee-broker named Squibson. The objection to Squibson was that he did not take such a serious view of volunteer service as Mooney did. He was addicted to joking in the ranks and playing boyish games. He would sing on the march, and when the order was given to halt he would, if he were in the rear-rank, run up as though by accident against his front file and shove him right out of the line, to the indignation of the officer. But Squibson always apologised for such jests, and it was difficult to find fault with him. Even when he furtively stuck a carrot into the barrel of some man's rifle next him, as he did on one memorable occasion, when a very severe General was reviewing the corps, the laughter caused by the

little freak was enough to disarm the anger of his victim. One is sorry to say, however, that there was one man in the corps who really could not stand the coffee-broker's jests, and this was Mooney. Cicely Tott's lover had often sternly rebuked Squibson for his apparent ignorance of the objects for which volunteer corps were first started. Did he imagine, forsooth, that volunteering was a mere playing at soldiers like schoolboys? When Mooney propounded this question, Squibson used to close one eye with an expression most ridiculous in a grown man, and offer to toss the bank clerk for a drink at the nearest luncheon-bar, which, as Mooney feelingly remarked, was a flippant begging of the whole question.

When Mooney found himself placed next to Squibson on the review day, he had serious thoughts of asking his captain to allow him to fall in elsewhere; but, as though divining such a purpose, Squibson made a spontaneous declaration that for this day he was going to turn over a new leaf. "The eyes of foreign powers will be upon us," said he, in a voice which the bank clerk thought sincere, "so for this once I must show that I have the honour of our corps at

heart." "Quite so," answered Mooney seriously, and he was much gratified by the seemly way in which the coffee-broker conducted himself during the march to Waterloo Station. Squibson only once put his tongue in his cheek when spoken to by an officer ; and twice only did he imitate the crowing of a cock. But this, as he explained, was only out of his natural exuberance of spirits at going to meet his Queen, and he promised that once he was on the review ground he would "take the shine" out of everybody. "Meanwhile," added he, "I've a brandy-flask in my pocket, so we'll have a good time going down."

The journey to Windsor was performed without accident, and, thanks to Squibson, rather pleasantly. He sang comic songs all the way, and extemporised riddles with sharp points in them, for no funnier wag than he ever donned a tunic. He also passed his brandy-flask round, thereby exhilarating the spirits of his comrades, packed close in a third-class carriage, and causing them to roar the louder with laughter whenever he spoke. To all this Mooney could make no objection, for even warriors must unbend in the train ; and our bank clerk was

none of your pragmatic fellows, who take exception to a joke in good season. More than once he joined in the laughter so heartily that he became dubious as to whether he ought not to have let out two holes in his belt instead of one ; and once, when Squibson slapped him on the thigh, he returned the compliment with brotherly heartiness. However, on reaching Windsor, Mooney became grave once more, and it was with indescribable disgust that he perceived that Squibson did not intend to follow his example.

The 200th Metropolitan had marched through the Long Walk to their station on the review-ground, and here they ought to have found a field canteen in readiness to serve them with refreshments. But, as sometimes happens in England, the administrative arrangements had broken down, and the mess-waggon which had been stocked with beer and sandwiches was labouring away somewhere on the road to Staines. As a consequence, the gallant Poultry Corps found themselves hungry and thirsty, with every prospect of remaining so till the review was over ; and this dashed the ardour of the most bellicose volunteers present, always excepting Wellington Mooney, who, though his parched

tongue seemed to have turned to tinder in his mouth, bethought him that these are privations which a soldier is bound to bear without repining. Squibson, on the contrary, began to murmur, and then it was seen how little this man's soul was imbued with fortitude in adhering to a resolution. At first he said impatiently : " Oh ! I can't stand this ;" then he added : " I won't stand it." His next step was to ask one of the officers whether he might fall out and go to buy a pottle of strawberries of a fruit-woman whom he descried in the distance. This favour having being denied, the coffee-broker possessed his soul in a sort of sullen patience till the corps was drawn up in a line for the inspection of the General in command of the brigade. With a great clanking and prancing of attendant aides-de-camps this grizzled veteran rode down the ranks, and reined in for a moment to give some directions about dressing-up. Then, at this critical moment it was that the following abominable exclamation was heard issuing from the ranks :—

" I am not going to fight for my country unless I have a ham sandwich !"

"What?" thundered the General, aghast with astonishment.

"I am not going to appear before the Queen of England with an empty stomach," repeated the voice, varying its expression of mutiny.

"Who spoke like that?" roared the General, as he scanned the ranks with a rolling eye. "Let the man fall out at once—at once, I say!"

No man spoke for an instant, but a thrill passed through the corps, and all the men in it turned round, gazing in horror at the coffee-broker. But Squibson, who remained cool as a cherry, suddenly nudged Mooney, as if it were he who was the culprit; and in a voice full of innocence, said audibly "Now, man, speak up, and tell the General what you want."

"How dare you?" gasped Mooney, beside himself. "Why, why——"

"Speak up louder," cried the facetious Squibson, with another nudge. "Tell the General you don't mind whether it's ham or beef, so long as it's eatable."

This was too much for Wellington Mooney. "You blackguard," shouted he, and clenching his fist, he gave Squibson a push on the chest which sent him reeling through the front rank.

“What ho!” bawled the General, witnessing this unjustifiable act of aggression. “Make a prisoner of that man.”

“But, General, it wasn’t I!” shrieked the bank clerk, choking with rage and fright.

“Not a word more, sir,” roared the General, shaking his gloved hand at Mooney. “Some of you volunteers seem to think that you may make a mock of discipline, but whilst you are under my orders I’ll teach you the contrary. Here, send for a guard; disarm this man, and lead him to the rear.”

There was a guard of grenadiers keeping the ground at about a hundred yards off. On the summons of an aide-de-camp, a corporal and four men marched up and made a prisoner of Wellington Mooney. In the presence of all his comrades they compelled him to give up his belt, his bayonet, and his rifle. Never till his dying day will he forget the humiliation of that moment. His head swam, his knees shook, his agonised tongue sought in vain to speak; but he was ordered bluntly to march off, and did so. Between his four captors, two on each side, and the corporal striding in front, he slunk off like a dog who has misbehaved himself. He

was taken through the first row of spectators, right out into the thickest part of the crowd. Boys jeered at him as he went, and ladies in carriages stared at him through their opera-glasses. To fill the cup of his mortification, poor Mooney was led past the carriage where Cicely Tott was seated with her mother, cousins, sisters, and aunts; and as he lifted an imploring glance towards this bevy he heard one of the young sisters scream: "Oh my! there's Mr. Mooney in custody; what has he done?"

To which a jocular voice in the crowd answered: "Been punching his General's head—so he's a-going to be shot."

Cicely Tott gave a shiver, uttered a slight squeal, and swooned in her betrothed's sight. Poor Wellington Mooney!

But worse was to come. The corporal of Mooney's escort was an Irishman of rollicking humour, who, seeing his prisoner in such distress, proceeded to work upon his fears. Tipping the wink to his men, among whom was one brother Irishman, he said with mock pity: "Arrah, sorr, be aisy now. Sure, ye'll get off with twenty-five lashes, for it was only a thrifle."

"I didn't hear what you said," answered

Mooney meekly, for the noise of the crowd made him think he had misunderstood the corporal's words.

"It's twenty-five lashes ye may be expecting, but not more," repeated the corporal confidentially. "Sure now, ye must be aware that volunteers are subject to military discipline on such a day as this, just like the regulars."

"But not—not to flogging?" stammered Mooney, his eyes jutting from his head and his tongue sticking to his palate from fright.

"Pathrick," said the corporal, addressing the Irish grenadier, "jost be telling this jintleman how many l. shes the Provost-Marshal gave to that fat volunteer who tried some of his larks on at the Wimbledon review last year."

"Fifty lashes, bedad! and it's meeself tied him up to the triangles," replied Pat phlegmatically

Wellington Mooney had a dim perception that he was being hoaxed, but he looked in vain for a tell-tale smile on the stolid features of his escort. "I—I never read of that case in the papers," was all he could find to say as he trudged along, keeping step with the quick marching of the grenadiers.

"Och, sure, those cases don't get into the papers," answered the corporal, with a short laugh. * "It's quite silent ye'll be keeping yerself when ye've had the 'cat' laid on yer. Jintlemen o' your sort, sorr, don't loike to go and show their backs to the jintlemen who write in the peeapers. Maybe, to oblige ye, the Provost-Marshal will jost have ye flogged quietly in the recreation-room at barracks while the band are practising down-stairs, so that the music may drown your noise whilst you're a hollaring."

Poor Mooney broke into a cold perspiration. Ignorant, like most men, of the *minutiæ* of his country's laws, he knew that the "cat" had not been abolished in time of war; but he had a vague idea that reviews were assimilated to warlike operations, and that volunteers who took part in them were subjected to the same disciplinary penalties as regulars—the "cat" amongst them. To do the wretched man justice, he was conscience-stricken into the bargain; and felt that in striking Squibson he had committed an offence which no General could overlook. He loathed himself for that act of indiscipline which must set such a bad example to the rest of the

corps, and which made him, even according to his own private judgment, unfit to wear the Queen's uniform again. And yet what an awful thing it would be to get flogged for a moment's hastiness, caused by ruthless provocation !

Setting aside the physical pain of having nine thongs of whip-cord applied to his cuticle—a pain which was likely to be exquisite in his case, for like most plump men, Wellington Mooney was very thin-skinned—setting this aside, what a fearful disgrace it would be to be flogged ! How could Mooney ever hope after that to become a partner in his bank ? How could Miss Cicely Tott, so romantic as she was, ever consent to give him her hand ? In the midst of these dismal cogitations, the prisoner and his escort reached an ambulance tent, which chanced to be empty ; so Mooney was ordered to walk in, with the intimation that the Provost-Marshal would come and deal with him presently.

He sat down moaning on a camp-stool. Outside, soldiers were laughing wildly, and he could hear them. They talked of the “cat” and triangles ; they shouted to a pair of drummers to get ready for an execution, at which their services would be required ; they speculated

among themselves as to the amount of endurance which the victim would show—whether he would roar at the first or the fifth lash, &c. Poor Mooney felt as if he were in the land of the doomed, listening to the palaver of fiends. Presently the corporal strolled into his tent, escorted by a hospital sergeant with a droll twinkle in his eye (he was also Irish), and who held a tape yard-measure in his hand.

"Please stand up, sorr," said the corporal; "here's the sergeant come to take the measure of your back, to know what sized 'cat' will be required for ye."

"But am I to be condemned unheard?" faltered Mooney, as he yielded himself unresistingly to the operation of measurement, bethinking himself that his safest course now was to do as he was told.

"By jabers, but it's a broad back," chuckled the sergeant, as he spanned with his tape the regions between Mooney's neck and his waist. "Nothing less than the first quality 'cat' will do for you, sorr. Lucky we brought the 'thieves' cat' with us, eh, Larry?"

The word "thieves' cat" overcame what little fortitude still remained to Wellington

Mooney, and he sank down on his stool, feeling inclined to weep. The soldiers went out, and for a moment there was more laughter outside, but suddenly a dead silence fell upon the joking Guardsmen. Then the tent-door was raised, and abruptly a General, attended by an aide-de-camp, presented himself before the quailing eyes of Mooney.

"Tention," bawled the corporal, who stood in the doorway, and Mooney stood up with his arms rigid to his sides.

"What's this I hear of you?" asked the Provost-Marshall severely, for it was he. "You strike a comrade in the ranks; do you think such acts can be tolerated?"

"I am very sorry, sir," pleaded poor Mooney, and he was about to explain matters; but remembering that he might get Squibson into the same trouble as himself, his generous soul forbore. "I am really very sorry, sir," he repeated with a doleful whine.

"So you ought to be," replied the Provost-Marshall. "You volunteers ought to take a pride in being well-behaved, for nothing obliges you to serve. Go away with you. The commandant of your corps will have to consider

whether he will get you dismissed, or not." Saying which the terrible military official turned on his heel, and left Mooney free.

Quite free ! The miserable man staggered out into the daylight and saw grinning soldiers, who ironically saluted him. He walked off, and none stopped him ; and yet his heart was sad. In the distance he descried the Queen's carriage, and regiment after regiment filing by in splendid array. There were gorgeous dragoons, artillerymen with their dashing teams, Guardsmen whose bearskins moved like a black forest, and an endless pageant of volunteers, red, green, and gray. Then there was the music, the cheering of the crowds, the sunshine of the glorious sky ; and Wellington Mooney, in his deep disgrace, wailed that he should have taken no part in the honours of this fine day

"Oh, what a lesson this has been !" groaned he. "I shall never forget it—never !"

* * * * *

Poetical justice would not be vindicated if we omitted to add that, at the next parade of the Poultry Corps, Wellington Mooney received ample amends. Squibson explained matters with honourable frankness, and the commandant,

calling Mooney out of the ranks, extended to him the hand of friendship, and voted he was sorry—deuced sorry, egad !

What more shall we say ? Wellington Mooney has since thriven in his career, for he is now a lieutenant in his corps, a partner in his bank, and the happy husband of Miss Tott. As for Squibson, who, to the general satisfaction, has given up volunteering, he stood godfather to Mr. and Mrs. Mooney's first child.

VII.

THE SCOUT'S DAUGHTER.

HE was a mild young man named Knagbone, who was about to take his degree at Oxford prior to entering the Church, and he loved, or fancied he loved, Martha or Patty Figgle, the daughter of his quondam scout, and present lodging-house landlord. Miss Figgle was a sprightly damsel, with a great deal of flaxen hair fluffed all over her forehead, poodle-wise. She had four sisters, all as attractive as herself, and when on Sundays these five virgins walked in Christ Church meadows, tricked out in their best, they caused no slight flutter in the breasts of undergraduates. Old Dick Figgle, the scout, was proud of his progeny, as well he might be, and he used to say, slapping his pocket every time he had received a tip of some value from one or other of the fast youngsters who lodged in Tom Quad: "I ain't a gentleman, and doan't try to pass myself

off as such ; but my daughters can show off their silk gowns against any ladies in the land." This was true enough, for the Misses Figgle revelled in silk attire ; and it was notorious that during the Long Vacs. they used to go strolling about with their father at places of fashionable seaside resort, where old Figgle was often mistaken for a banker. He was a widower, and it was Martha, his eldest daughter, who kept house for him at Oxford, ruling over the "slavey," or maid-of-all-work, who waited upon the pair of undergrads. lodging by university licence under the protection of Figgle. Now Patty was twenty-six years old, and our friend Knagbone but twenty-one, which explains how easily this unsophisticated youth fell a prey to the wiles of a sorceress who had already tried her powers upon a round dozen of young gentlemen in process of education at Christ Church. For it must be admitted that Miss Martha Figgle was no novice in the art of enchantment ; and once Anthony Knagbone had got entangled in her meshes he felt as helpless in them as a fly.

For all this he did attempt to struggle, and when Degree-day came round he might have been seen at early morning intent upon the un-

manly occupation of packing up his traps by stealth. His door was locked ; through his open window came a balm of summer flowers, mingling with the voice of a brother undergraduate, who shouted in a loud stage whisper : " Now then, Knag, look sharp ! "

Anthony, who had just fastened a rope to one of the handles of his portmanteau, lifted this receptacle, and lowered it cautiously through the window into the arms of his friend below, who consigned it to a lad waiting in the road with a barrow. After the portmanteau, Anthony lowered a hat-box, then a carpet-bag, and he was just in the act of putting out a sheaf of umbrellas and sticks wrapped in a rug, when an ominous sound made him stop. A window above his was being opened. It was so early in the morning that he had counted on being able to get all his luggage out of the house unnoticed before any one was up ; but now he heard the voice of the elder Miss Figgle exclaim : " What's that ? Who's there ? Oh, my goodness ! Papa, here's thieves ! Help ! murder ! "

Anthony Knagbone dropped his rug and sticks into the arms of his friend, and, seeing the latter hastily vanish with the lad and barrow, he had

some thoughts of descending after him, at the risk of breaking his neck; but it was already too late. There was a commotion in the house. Lightly-clad maidens were racing about the passages above, crying, "Papa, papa;" and soon a very avalanche of them in their bed-gowns rolled down-stairs and thumped at Knagbone's door. He opened it, and most of them took to flight; but Patty, who had had time to huddle on a petticoat and jacket, sat at the foot of the stairs waiting. "Oh, you wretch—you villain! Anthony, I'll expoge you and have the law on yer; you'll see if I don't."

Anthony stood looking like a pickpocket who has been caught in the very act of theft. Not only had he to bear the reproaches of Miss Figgle, but old Dick, her father, coming down-stairs in shirt-sleeves and slippers, with a cotton nightcap on his head, assumed the attitude of a tragedy parent, and whined, "I shouldn't have believed it of you, Mr. Knagbone, indeed I shouldn't. What were you trying to bolt for?"

"I wasn't bolting," stammered Knagbone, but then the hopelessness of such an evasion presented itself to him, and he thought he had best brazen out the case. "Well, yes, I did mean to

bolt," cried he ; " I thought I'd get my luggage off first, and I meant to go myself as soon as my degree had been conferred. The—the truth is, Mr. Figgle, I don't see my way to marrying your daughter."

" Oh ! you deceiver, you, I'll drag you into the law-courts for breach of promise," screamed Patty, lifting her hands to her nightcap, and allowing her hair to fall in cascades over her shoulders. " Only to think, father, that he told me, not three days ago, that he loved me ; and he talks of becoming a parson, too ! "

" A man who tells lies can't hope to make a good clergyman," said old Figgle sententiously " Mr. Knagbone, sir, I'll speak to your tutor, and he'll write to your father."

" My father won't think I have acted wrongly," faltered the undergraduate timidly.

" We'll see, sir," replied the old scout. " We'll see what Archdeacon Knagbone thinks of your conduct when he finds himself obliged to fork out ten thousand pounds damages to prevent your going to prison."

Now Anthony knew enough of his father to be aware that the latter would pull a very long face indeed if made to pay a single guinea to

save his son from anything. The Archdeacon was not prodigal of his pence. He set by a certain sum annually for the education of his children, and he expected each and all of them to live within their respective sums, and never to plague him for loans to meet extras. Upon Anthony, especially, as his eldest-born, he had impressed the necessity of "going straight," for Anthony was to inherit a family living, and the Archdeacon looked to him to set a good example to his brothers and sisters. These were very bitter reflections for the parson *in posse* to make, as he watched the weeping of Miss Figgle and heard the upbraidings of that damsel's father; all the more so as poor young Knagbone felt that he was not blameless as regarded his dealings with Patty. He had written sentimental verses in her album. He had presented her with a seven-and-sixpenny purse on her birthday; and he had prevailed upon her to work for him a pair of worsted slippers which he had vowed to wear to his life's end, "and even in his coffin." Surely these small but significant facts were tantamount to a promise to marry! When confronted with them by the implacable reminders of his own

conscience, Anthony Knagbone felt faint. He had a good heart, and fancied that he liked Miss Figgle; but he was terribly afraid of the Archdeacon, who had the sternest notions about *mésalliances*, and he had a shrewd sort of idea that his numerous sisters would not look upon Miss Figgle as a very eligible candidate for admission to their family circle. So young Knagbone groaned; and by way of cutting short a discussion which was growing too painful, he made a sudden plunge down-stairs, caught up his college cap and gown in the hall, and darted out of the house. The voices of Patty and her indignant sisters rang yelling in his ears as he made this undignified escape.

But, alas! Oxford is not a large place, and when Knagbone had paced the streets for an hour, then turned into Christ Church for early chapel, then gone to a chum's rooms to get some breakfast, the striking of various clocks reminded him that the time had come when he must go and submit to the ceremony which would entitle him for ever after to tack the letters B.A. to his name. Slowly wending his way down the Corn Market, he had just

reached Balliol when the excited figure of a don waving the wide sleeves of a proctorial gown at him obstructed his line of sight. He recognised his tutor, the Rev. Jeremy Fussel, who was Proctor for that year, and the strictest censor of morals among the many then flourishing in the University. "Oh, Knagbone, unfortunate fellow!" cried the Proctor, approaching his pupil. "I've come out to meet you. You can't take your degree, you know. There's a poor girl whom you have deceived most cruelly, and who is crying yonder. She means to go in and stop your degree."

"But—but she can't, can she?" stammered poor Anthony.

"Women can do anything," answered the Proctor, who, being a bachelor, was a gallant soul, prone to think highly of female witchery. "Oh, Knagbone, Knagbone, why did you trifle with this fair and confiding child?"

"But she's my scout's daughter, sir; I really can't marry her," screamed the Archdeacon's son, driven to bay.

"Why can't you marry a scout's daughter if she loves you and you love her?" asked Mr. Fussel, in seeming wonder. "Are these

arguments Christianlike, Knagbone? Surely, in uttering them you must feel ashamed of yourself?"

Knagbone did feel ashamed of himself, since the Proctor put it in that way; and having once more groaned, he felt inclined to bolt as he had done before, but the Rev. Jeremy stopped him by the arm. "If I go and make things right for you with that young lady and her father, so that you can take your degree to-day, will you promise to act like a man afterwards?" he asked with sorrowful earnestness.

"Well, but I have my father to consider," pleaded Knagbone.

"Oh, I'll see your father, and he'll listen to me," continued the Proctor in agitation. "Just give me your word, and that will do."

"It's really very kind of you," faltered Knagbone, much puzzled that the Proctor should thus interest himself in his love-affairs; and he gave the required promise, not knowing to what exact things it pledged him, but satisfied to reflect that it would at least assist him to take his degree, which was the main point for the present.

He did get his degree an hour afterwards, for

Miss Figgle was not there to stop him. Then, being free to depart from the University, Knagbone bethought him that his luggage was at the station, so that he might as well abscond without looking at Miss Figgle again. He did depart accordingly. It was a mean thing to do, and he was rightly paid for his conduct by undergoing terrible anxieties during the early period of his sojourn at home. Every morning when the post came he trembled lest it should bring a letter from the Proctor to the Archdeacon, or one from a solicitor to him, Anthony, announcing an action for breach of promise. Meanwhile, living in these fears, Anthony Knagbone was afraid to pursue his theological studies, lest the scandal which he feared to be impending should prevent him from entering the Church, and he was on the point of declaring to his father that he would take to the law as a profession, when one morning, looking through the *Times*, he came upon this startling announcement:—

FUSSEL—FIGGLE.—On the 3rd inst., at St. Ulfrid's Church, Oxford, by the Rev Thomas Fussel, brother of the bridegroom, the Rev. Jeremy Fussel, late Proctor of the University,

to Martha, eldest daughter of Richard Figgle, Esq. No cards.

"No cards. I should think so!" ejaculated Anthony in wonder and delight. "I'll send my card with compliments and thanks to him, though."

"To whom are you going to send your card, Anthony?" asked the Archdeacon gravely.

"To my old tutor, who has just married my old scout's daughter," answered Knagbone, not able to repress a smile.

"Ah, yes, I was told of that coming marriage," said the Archdeacon mildly "A most suitable match. I hear Miss Figgle is a very well-educated girl, and the other day an uncle of hers who died in Australia—an ex-gold-digger, I believe—left her forty thousand pounds. But what's the matter with you, Anthony? You look quite pale!"

"I don't think the fish we ate at breakfast was quite cooked enough," whimpered Anthony Knagbone in the most doleful of voices; and he let the *Times* fall with a snivel and a sigh. "Oh, the heartless girl!" cried he. "When I think of how I loved her, and was ready to do anything

for her sake ! O, women, women ! There is no such thing as honour among them !”

And he fell to reckoning how many years of an Archdeacon's income it would take to make £40,000.

VIII.

A JERSEY ROSE.

THE postman who stopped to deliver his letters at Mr. Aubyn's house, B—— square, St. Helier's, little guessed what calamity was contained in one of them which he handed to pretty Rose Aubyn, who came herself to answer his knock. There was one letter in a small pink envelope which the beauty hastily slipped into her own pocket, blushing (and possibly it was for this one missive that she had come to the door instead of allowing the servant to do so); then she glanced at the other letters and saw that the postman was waiting. "That one is registered, miss," he said, touching his cap, and Rose took the post-book from him, saying she would go with it to her father. In a few moments she returned with the signature, and smiled as she handed back the book to the postman. She always did smile; for her face was like a bright,

pink shell on which the sunlight plays. She had mirth in her clear blue eyes, and sweetness on her lips. "Pretty, pretty creature," mused the postman as he went out to continue his rounds, gladdened by what he had seen, and was fated never to see again. For this postman saw the very last of Rose Aubyn's smiles. The pallor of the lily was soon to clothe the once happy face; and never again was that whiteness, which is the mourning garb of the human countenance, to be put off—never, never!

Rose tripped back, humming, to the breakfast-room, and the smile which still hovered over her lips, half opened like the petals of a flower, died away as she saw her father. He had just been reading the registered letter, and wore such a startled, troubled look that Rose's mother, brother, and younger sister sat eyeing him in consternation. He was evidently about to speak, but when Rose came in he crumpled the letter into his pocket, made a sign to his wife, and endeavoured to master his emotions. Rose, however, had caught one glance of his eye which had fallen upon her, and it struck her heart like a shot, making her turn suddenly faint. There was no anger in the glance, but pity and wistful

fear. Rose grew cold as with a sense of impending danger, and, throughout the breakfast, trembled. Her mother scolded her gently for not eating, but she pleaded that she was not well, and her glance kept wandering to the window. Suddenly the appearance of a waggonette driven by a tall, military-looking man, who nodded pleasantly as he passed the house, made Rose half rise from her chair; but her father, with a wave of the hand, ordered her to keep her seat. There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Aubyn said to the servant, who was in the room: "Show Captain Ferrager into my study," saying which he went out, and Rose began to cry.

"Oh, Rose! what can have happened?" exclaimed Mr. Aubyn's younger daughter, Lily. "Is there to be no picnic to-day? Mamma, what was there in that letter that made papa look so sad?"

"Rose, dear, you mustn't cry like that," said Mrs. Aubyn, drawing her daughter's head to her shoulder and fondling her; but she could not impart much consolation, for she herself, poor woman, did not know what was in the letter.

"I expect there's some bad news," muttered Tom Aubyn, stroking his moustache uneasily;

but he was at a loss to imagine what the news could be, or whom it might concern.

“Anyhow, I hope our picnic won’t be stopped,” observed Lily ruefully. She and her sister had been counting on a pleasant excursion into the country, and Captain Ferrager had come early on purpose to escort them.

Mrs. Aubyn made no answer, and Lily was fain to go to the window and stare at the waggonette, on the box of which was perched a hamper suggestive of good things. Half-an-hour passed ; and Lily and Tom, unable to bear longer suspense, left the room. Rose remained alone with her mother. She had dried her eyes, and sat in speechless misery, apprehending but too surely that the news her father had received concerned in some way Captain Roy Ferrager, whom she loved, and to whom she was engaged. Another half-hour passed, then Mr. Aubyn’s study door opened, and steps were heard in the passage. Rose started to her feet and ran to the window. Her heart turned to ice as she saw Ferrager, with a woe-struck face and an unsteady step, climb to the box of his waggonette, and drive off.

The next minute Mr. Aubyn entered the

room, looking most melancholy, though determined.

“My dear Rose,” he said, in the tone of a man who thinks it kindest to make a painful communication in the most peremptory way, “I am sorry to say that you must cease all intercourse with Captain Ferrager from this day, for I have forbidden him the house. He has been trifling with you ; I find he is married.”

“Married !” echoed Rose in a voice that died on her lips in a kind of moan.

“Yes, he is married,” answered Mr. Aubyn with a sigh. “He has told me his story, which is a most sad one, for it seems that he separated from his wife on the very day of his wedding, having discovered that she had deceived him about her antecedents. However, that has nothing to do with us ; for so long as Ferrager’s wife is alive he cannot marry you.”

Rose made no reply, but sank on a chair with her hands clasped. Her head drooped like a flower broken on its stalk.

* * * * *

The story of Captain Ferrager’s marriage, of course, leaked out, and became the scandal of society in St. Helier’s for some days. It was an

anonymous letter that had informed Mr. Aubyn of it; but Rose's father managed to keep secret the fact that the Captain had been engaged to his daughter. Under the circumstances no blame could rest on Ferrager for having acted dishonourably, as it would have done had the whole truth been revealed. All that people knew for certain was that Captain Roy Ferrager had greatly admired Miss Aubyn, that he had constantly danced attendance on her—some said flirted with her—at parties and picnics; but after all there had been nothing in his attentions which could actually compromise the girl. In Mr. Aubyn's household, however, a bitter resentment was cherished against the man who had gone the length of proposing to Rose, and would probably have led her to the altar, had not Mr. Aubyn been warned in time by some unknown enemy of Ferrager's. Tom Aubyn, a lad of twenty, who was about to enter the army, vowed that the Captain ought to be kicked out of the service, and nothing but the fear of damaging his sister's reputation kept him from making a complaint to the Colonel of Ferrager's regiment. As it was, the hot youth took an early opportunity of shaking his fist in private

under the Captain's nose, and swearing that if the latter ever ventured to talk to Rose again he should be killed. Thereupon Ferrager entered gently upon a defence of his own conduct. "I had all along intended to get a divorce," he said. "My lawyers had been instructed to get up a case for me, and your father should have known the truth, even if he had not been informed of it by an anonymous traducer."

"Why did you not tell us the facts from the first, and save us all this trouble?"

"Because I loved your sister, and shrank from making an avowal which might cut me off from all intercourse with her; I resolved day after day to make my confession, but from timidity put it off."

"Well, please understand that all connection between you and my sister is at an end," said Tom Aubyn, who felt disconcerted nevertheless by the Captain's calmness.

"I don't consider our connection at an end," was Ferrager's rejoinder, "for when I have got my divorce I hope your father will see that I have never done anything that could render me unworthy to claim your sister's hand."

Tom Aubyn grumbled some discouraging reply,

for he had got to hate Ferrager as much as he had liked him before ; and he much wished that he could prevail upon his sister to discard all thought of the man. It angered him to see Rose fret and cry day after day as if her heart were breaking. The whole family had become afflicted by the girl's sorrow, and there was continual sadness among them as in a house of mourning. Thus three weeks passed in gloom, till one day Tom Aubyn noticed that his sister's manner had suddenly brightened. Rendered suspicious by his antipathy towards the Captain, he watched Rose, and detected her reading a letter, which she hid away in such confusion when surprised, that he felt sure she and the Captain had resumed a correspondence. A little more watching convinced him that one of the housemaids was acting as letter-carrier between Ferrager and Rose, and having dogged the girl's footsteps, he caught her in the very act of taking a note in the street from Ferrager's servant. The latter had his back turned during this occurrence, so that he did not see Tom ; but as soon as he was gone, Rose's brother accosted the maid, and ordered her at once to give up the letter. "I'll take it from you by force if you don't, and you

shall be turned out of your situation," he cried, indignantly

"Oh, sir, don't turn me away, and please have pity on Miss Rose," whimpered the girl, giving up the missive.

"You shall keep your situation on one condition only, and that is that you do not breathe a word of this to my sister," said Tom, as he broke open the letter. "Miss Rose is not to hear that this note has fallen into my hands; mind that."

The maid readily gave the promise required, and hurried off with her heart fluttering. As for Tom, when he had perused the note, he tore it into pieces, and an evil gleam passed over his features. "So ho! this blackguard wants to meet Rose in our house this evening, when everybody has gone to bed," he muttered between his teeth. "Well, we'll see."

That night, at two a.m., punctual to the appointment he had made in his clandestine letter to Rose, Captain Ferrager rapped softly with his finger-tips on the door of Mr. Aubyn's house. He had directed that the housemaid should be in waiting for him, and let him in noiselessly. The door opened as arranged, but

it was not the maid or Rose who confronted Ferrager. Tom Aubyn stood before him with his fists clenched. "Put up your hands, you scoundrel, for I am going to hit you," he said, and with these words he levelled a savage blow at the Captain's face.

Ferrager sought to defend himself, but he had to deal with an opponent whose strength was doubled by rage. The scuffle was brief, but the Captain bore the marks of it for many a day. On the morrow he was not present at parade, and the regimental surgeon reported him on the sick list as being "horribly mauled and bruised from a fall down some steps"; for this was the explanation which Ferrager chose to give of his plight.

* * * *

Some six months after this, Mr. Aubyn, Rose's father, died suddenly. Not altogether suddenly either, for he had been ailing in health for some time past, and the breaking off of his daughter's engagement with Captain Ferrager had struck him a great blow. Mr. Aubyn was one of those men who fret inwardly, and whose vitals get corroded with sorrow before there is any outward sign of the fact. A loving father,

he could not bear to witness Rose's despondent grief, and a slight attack of illness, which would have been nothing to him had he been strong, carried him off in a few days, because his constitution had been too much impaired to bear up against it.

In the interval between Mr. Aubyn's death and his funeral, Captain Ferrager asked for a month's leave of absence, and hired a yacht. On the very morning of the funeral he set sail; and the same day Rose Aubyn disappeared. It was taken for granted that she had eloped with Captain Ferrager; but a week afterwards an awful discovery shocked the nerves of sensitive people in St. Helier's. Some fishermen picked up on the coast a slender, white hand, evidently that of a girl, which had been severed at the wrist, and which the sea had washed up. It wore two rings, and these were proved to have been Rose Aubyn's.

Roy Ferrager returned to Jersey when his leave of absence had expired, and the police immediately questioned him about Rose. He denied all knowledge of her, and the crew of his yacht (save the steward, who could not be found) swore to a man that no lady had been

on board during any period of their cruise. The mystery remains unsolved to this day. Did Ferrager murder Rose Aubyn? If so, why?

Perhaps the steward could have told the truth, but all researches as to his whereabouts proved unavailing. It was said that he had been set ashore at Lisbon, but the Portuguese police could get no clue as to when he had come or whither he had gone.

IX.

HOW HAGGAI SLEW A PARROT.

A PROVERB invented by some facetious judge says that there is no wrong without a remedy at law. One might as well say that there is no disease which is not curable if you could only find the proper drug. But the difficulty lies in discovering that drug.

Readers of this little story may be disposed to agree that the law has not yet provided any remedy for such a wrong as befell a most respectable solicitor of Bath, named Haggai Higginson, by reason of his enmity with a local bird-stuffer, one Ethelwolf Grimes.

You must know that Mr. Higginson was a lawyer, at once pompous and sensitive. He cared a great deal about the good opinion of his contemporaries, and consequently received it as so much wages due. He would never take up the cause of a man whom he thought intent

upon a piece of rascality unless exceedingly well paid ; and as it was known that he was so scrupulous in his choice of clients, it had passed into a byword to say that his clients always won their law-suits.

One day, Grimes the bird-stuffer appealed to Haggai Higginson for professional advice. His cause may have been sound or bad, or it may have been that Grimes was a poor man—on this point none of us have any data for an opinion—but at all events Higginson refused to have anything to do with it. Grimes went away with a flea in his ear. He was a little, shock-haired, beetle-browed man, very irritable, and of a most vindictive nature. When he returned to his shop he clenched his fist at the array of stuffed owls, ducks, and flamingoes around him ; he even went so far as to kick a stuffed pelican, the pride of his stock, and he swore that he would be even with Higginson.

Grimes had no wife to suggest counsels of prudence. The ugly little man lived alone in his shop, working all day long in his shirt-sleeves ; and whilst at work he had plenty of time to brood. He would turn an injury over and over in his mind as more placable men chew a cud ;

and there were times when he burst out laughing diabolically, whereupon one might be sure that he had hit on some wicked plan with which to injure or annoy an enemy.

The vengeance which this fellow at last imagined as regards Haggai Higginson was at once ingenious and fierce.

In addition to his stuffed birds, Grimes had the usual live stock of men of his calling—dogs, weasels, cage-birds, and among these a beautiful gray parrot, endowed with a voice almost human in its distinctness. Grimes had bestowed much pains on the education of this fowl, which he hoped to sell some day for a high price ; but he had never suspected how deep were the bird's powers of observation and memory, till one afternoon, being seated in his shop and abusing his enemy aloud, he heard a voice repeat in startling accents : “ Haggai's a thief.”

“ Who's there ? ” said Grimes, looking round rather frightened, for he did not at once guess that it was the parrot who had spoken.

“ Haggai's a thief ! ” repeated the bird, dancing gravely on its perch ; and then Grimes perceived who it was that had echoed his own thoughts so opportunely.

“ Oh, you jewel of a bird ! ” cried he, and running to a cupboard he brought out a long strip of nice raw beef, which he presented to the parrot as a thank-offering.

This done, Grimes rubbed his hands gleefully as melodramatic villains do. “ Oh, that clever bird,” exclaimed he ; “ he’s heard me repeat that Haggai’s a thief, and he’s remembered it. Now I’ll just stick his perch outside my door, and whenever Higginson passes he’ll hear what we think of him inside this place, and *it won’t be libel either, for the law can’t touch the bird nor prove that I taught him !* ”

Grimes’ shop stood at a corner of the market-place in the busiest part of the town, and Haggai Higginson’s offices were opposite. Several times a day the solicitor had to pass the bird-stuffer’s place of business, and it was evident that if Poll could be trained to abuse him every time he went by, a fruitful source of annoyance would arise. The question that preoccupied Grimes was how to open the intelligence of his parrot in such wise that it would know Higginson by sight, and never fail to give tongue at his coming. At first this did not seem easy, for birds, like some other bipeds, are fond of having their

own way ; but Grimes went to work with that patience which is only known to the vindictive. He neglected his business for several days that he might teach the parrot to understand a simple code of signals which he devised. At last the parrot got to understand this—that when Grimes uttered three low whistles he must cry : “ Haggai’s a thief,” under pain of getting a clout or two on the head ; on the other hand, if the parrot sung the words expected of him he was rewarded with one of those luscious bits of raw meat, which he loved better than anything on earth. The faculty for deductive argument is as keen in fowls as in men, and once the parrot had learned his lesson he never forgot it.

So one bright market-day, when Bath was full of farmers, drovers, and corn-chandlers, the parrot stood on its perch at Grimes’s door enjoying the sun’s rays. Grimes was in his shop stuffing a bullfinch ; but as he fingered his cotton-wool, and stuck his pins into the little deceased songster, he kept one of his small, wicked eyes fixed on the door of Mr. Higginson’s office. Suddenly the lawyer emerged, pompous and starched, and instantly hats were lifted to

him, for he was universally feared. Grimes gave three low whistles. This was just as Mr. Higginson was nearing the shop, and straightway the bird arched its neck, squalling: "Haggai's a thief!"

The insult was so unexpected that the lawyer stopped short on the pavement, dumbfounded. "Haggai's a thief—a thief—a thief!" repeated the parrot excitedly; for his master continued to whistle softly in a minor key. There was quite a crowd now at the door, farmers, yokels, and idle townsfolk, who guffawed with laughter. Mr. Higginson, scarlet with indignation, walked on. He was not popular in the town (very virtuous men seldom are), and there were possibly many folks who, like Grimes, had private reasons for laughing at his discomfiture. But the bird-stuffer was astute enough not to carry things too far, and rushing out, he pretended to be in great astonishment at what had happened. "Why, what has the bird been saying?" cried he.

"He's been and called Lawyer Higginson a thief," answered a stout farmer, laughing as if his waistcoat would burst.

"God bless my soul! who can have told him

that?" replied Grimes, with affected artlessness, and by this saying he did his enemy tenfold more harm than if he had joined in the laughter. It was, moreover, noticed that he pulled in the perch at once and vehemently scolded his parrot; so all that afternoon at the different inns and market ordinaries the farmers, cattle-drovers, corn-chandlers, horse-dealers, and ostlers had a quiet joke over their glasses, saying: "Who can have told that parrot that Haggai is a thief?"

Meanwhile, Haggai Higginson had walked straight to the town-hall and asked the magistrates for a summons against Ethelwolf Grimes. The summons was served the same day, but was not returnable till the following Monday, five days thence; so that in the interval the bird-stuffer had plenty of time in which to pursue his vengeance coolly. He did not miss his chance either. Every time the lawyer walked out of his office, the parrot, standing on his perch, flapped his wings and craned his throat, screeching: "Haggai's a thief!"

On the first day poor Higginson faced the parrot bravely enough; on the second day he winced, feeling that he was becoming a laughing-

stock to the whole town; but on the third day he no longer had the courage to pass Grimes's shop, and struck across the market-place slantwise, with his head bent, and an ashamed expression on his countenance. It has been said that Haggai Higginson was extremely sensitive. Consequently all this to-do with the parrot mortified him deeply after his first anger was spent. He felt that as a result of all his shrewd conduct during many years he was now in this hour of trial almost without a friend; and that, in fact, far more people enjoyed the bird's joke than blamed it. Nevertheless, Mr. Higginson was one of those men who have a holy faith in Acts of Parliament, and he felt sure that a law could be raked out of the statute-book to put down Grimes's parrot.

Alas! the event proved him to have been over sanguine. When that caitiff Grimes appeared before the magistrates, Mr. Higginson, who conducted his own case, failed to procure a single witness who could testify that the defendant had taught his parrot to say: "Haggai's a thief." Higginson even incurred ridicule by losing his temper, and trying to question the defendant, which some people thought was con-

trary to British law. In the upshot, the magistrates had to dismiss the case.

“We are sorry for you, Mr. Higginson,” said the Chairman, smothering a laugh; “but you have no case at law in this court. Your charge against the defendant for causing a nuisance must fall through, seeing that the parrot is not a nuisance to any one save yourself, and that even you need not pass within reach of his voice unless you please.”

“But, sir,” stammered Mr. Higginson, white with dismay and fury, “I may surely claim that the parrot is a nuisance to me, in the same sense as a dog who snaps at my calves when I walk out?”

“The dog may be supposed to have the intention of biting. Did the parrot try to bite you?”

“I don’t think, sir, that I am bound to prove the intention of biting.”

“Do you believe, then, that you could sue the master of a dog who merely barked at you?”

“If his bark annoyed or frightened me; if it were persistent, for instance.”

“Then if one of your neighbours’ cats persistently mewed at you when you passed the

area where it resided, do you think you could ask protection of this court by simply declaring that the cat frightened you?"

There was an outburst of laughter in court, and the wretched Higginson, greasy and plethoric, sat down nonplussed, and made dabs at his moistened brow with his pocket-handkerchief. He had overhauled his statute-books and found that there was nothing about parrots in them. The defendant left the court amid the humorous cheers of a rabble outside, and the plaintiff remained in court to pay the cost of the summons and to receive the condolences of the Bench.

But when Higginson returned home he felt persuaded that the spirit of the law must have been violated in his person. "There is no wrong without a remedy." These words, so often repeated as a truism by judges, kept cropping up in his mind, and he sat down to consider what was the particular remedy which the wisdom of our forefathers had bequeathed to him against the wrong-doing of Grimes's parrot.

If Grimes had been the publisher of a newspaper, and told the truth about Higginson day after day, Higginson might have brought an action against him, had his foolhardiness been

sufficient to induce him to adopt such a course. But could the parrot be assimilated to a news-sheet? Obviously not, for the publisher of a newspaper is responsible for what appears in his journal, whereas it was impossible to prove that Grimes had any share of responsibility in the words which the parrot, a mere unconscious bird, uttered. Nor could any action for damages properly lie against Grimes in any section of the Court of Judicature, failing proof positive of his having connived at the parrot's slander. On the whole Haggai Higginson felt routed. He saw that he had no remedy, and that any attempt to obtain legal redress for the moral injury done him, must result in his losing a good deal of money and being covered with ridicule.

Under the circumstances, Higginson set his head between his hands and pondered what he should do. It is an axiom of universal polity that where the law is powerless to protect individuals, society relapses into a state of nature, and that everybody must do for himself the best he can. The law, indeed, conservates this axiom so far as to allow a man to protect himself as he may in sudden emergencies, such as the attack of a mad dog, of a thief, of a madman, &c.

Now, Grimes's parrot was destructive of Higginson's peace—a danger and a scandal to him. So the lawyer judged the fowl before the tribunal of his own conscience, and calmly condemned him to die.

It was a solemn moment, that in which the solicitor decided that he was justified in taking the law into his own hands. He thrilled all over at the idea of the step he was about to take. He walked twice to a looking-glass and scanned himself sternly, as though he was seeking to assure himself by a glance at his own features that he was quite sober. At last he passed a hand determinedly through his scanty locks, caught up his hat and walked out.

In the street he met an intimate friend who, like him, was a lawyer, but who once—long, long ago—had been a drummer-boy in a militia regiment, and whose experience, therefore, as a martialist was valuable. “Follow me,” he said; “I want you to find out whether that parrot is asleep, and if he is, to be a witness of something I am going to do,” and the drummer followed him respectfully.

Mr. Higginson reached Grimes's shop. It was midnight; but, strange to relate, it was light as

day in the street where the parrot was accustomed to discourse. "Knock at the door," said Higginson to the ex-drummer; "and, when they open, step in as though you were paying a visit." The drummer knocked. A small maid opened the door, and when he said that he had business of importance with Mr. Grimes, he was shown into the parlour behind the shop. At one side of the fire sat Grimes, fast asleep; on the opposite side was the parrot, also wrapt in the arms of Morpheus. On tiptoe the ex-drummer returned to the front door. "Hist!" he said. "All is safe; they are both asleep; come in." Haggai Higginson, trembling in all his limbs at his own daring, stole in, followed by the ex-drummer. This brave man then stood before the sleeping parrot. His arms were severely crossed over his breast, and the ex-drummer eyed him with awe. In a low and trembling voice he said: "You have called me a thief, you have insulted me." Then he drew himself up and waited for full one minute for the parrot to attack him; but the unconscious Poll slept on. Haggai now drawing a thick buckskin glove over his left hand, seized the bird round the neck; there was a squeeze, a flutter, and the

parrot was dead. A sepulchral pallor suffused the cheek of Haggai. But his wrath was not yet appeased. Fiercely doubling his fists, he beat the dead bird with them and he tore out its feathers. Then he raised a stick—it was an heirloom in his family, like the *sabre de mon père* in that of the noble house of Gerolstein. With this implement he beat the perch from which his foe had proclaimed him a thief. The blows resounded through the parlour. Grimes moved uneasily in his sleep. The bravest of men are discreet in their valour. “Let us go,” said the ex-drummer. So they crawled out of the shop on all-fours. When they were again in the street, they clasped each other’s hands. “If you want any one to swear that you are a man of mettle, you may depend on me,” observed the ex-drummer. Haggai smiled, and, with a warlike strut, betook himself to his home. When he told his family what had occurred, they were very proud of him, but they went down on their knees and implored him never again to incur so terrible a risk.

An hour later Grimes awoke. On the floor he found the corpse of his parrot. Not a feather was disturbed, but he was dead. Grimes sus-

pected Haggai. He rushed off to his house and knocked wildly at the door. It was doubly locked and chained, but a window above was thrown up, and from it the triumphant Higginson looked down. "I slew the parrot," he shouted, "and if it ever says again 'Haggai is a thief,' I will slay it again. If you object to this, go to a police magistrate and ask him to protect your bird."

But Grimes did not take this advice. He stuffed the parrot and exhibited it before his shop. Beneath the unhappy victim he had written the tale of Haggai and the parrot. When the farmers, drovers, and corn-chandlers read it they laughed, but Haggai Higginson did not even smile.

X.

THE SHE-EPICURE.

WHEN honest Mr. Peter Jerring proposed for the hand of pretty Barbara Miffle, the young lady's father, a shy, careworn man, cleared his throat, and said: "My dear Peter, if I were selling you a horse you would expect me to inform you of any defects it might have, should you not?"

"It would be very kind of you to do so," answered Peter Jerring, civilly

"It would be my duty to do so," replied Mr. Miffle in a sententious tone; and he sighed. "Well, I am not selling you my daughter, though I shall no doubt derive considerable pecuniary advantage from parting with her; but I feel bound in honour to tell you of her defects."

"Don't, don't," said love-stricken Peter. "You are, perhaps, a little exacting, as a father

—h'm—has the right to be ; but I do assure you Miss Miffle has no faults.”

“None to affect her character, that I admit. Barbara is a good girl, and I dare say means well ; but, my dear Peter, she’s awfully greedy.”

“Ah ! is that all ? ”

“I am afraid you won’t say, ‘Is that all ? ’ when you see the bills she will run up for you at the confectioner’s and fruiterer’s. Why, at school she spent all her pocket-money on sweets, and she got into debt besides. Haven’t you noticed what a knife and fork she plays at dinner ? ”

“I have remarked that Miss Miffle has a good appetite, but I rather like to see that,” said Peter Jerring, with a laugh. “I don’t like your namby-pamby girls who are afraid to own that they are fond of steaks and porter.”

“If it were only a question of steaks and porter,” moaned the sorrowful father. “However, I don’t like to put you out of conceit with my girl. I have warned you, and that is enough. After all, you are a rich man, and can well afford to keep an expensive wife.”

“I am not rich,” demurred Peter Jerring. “But let us hope that with fifteen hundred a

year I shall be able to keep a table that will satisfy my wife."

"Let us hope so," echoed Mr. Miffle, as if he felt rather desponding on the subject; and the consent to Peter Jerring's marriage with Miss Barbara having been thus given, the bridegroom expectant left his future father-in-law's study and repaired to the garden to join his intended bride. He found her among the strawberry-beds, holding in one hand a cabbage-leaf half full of powdered sugar, into which she lovingly dipped her strawberries as fast as she plucked them.

A most pretty sight this seemed to the amorous Peter, who was of a not unpoetical turn of mind. Whilst he breathed his tale of love into Barbara's ear she went on eating fruit, and, at the magic moment, when he implored her to be his, she gracefully gathered the biggest strawberry she could see (one almost as big as a small tomato), rolled it into the sugar till it was all white, and then offered it to her lover's lips by way of answer.

"You bite off half of it first," was his softly-murmured prayer.

She sweetly complied and bit off the bigger

half, then Peter ate the rest, and in a loving transport pressed the stalk to his white waistcoat, where it made a red stain. This, by a happy inspiration, he forthwith compared to his heart's blood, which he would always be ready to shed, said he, for the girl of his choice.

A month later the tender pair were married, and Barbara's appetite at the wedding breakfast left nothing to be desired.

Peter Jerring was a young man of about thirty, who had nothing to do beyond trying to amuse himself. He owned a fine mansion in a country town, and before his marriage had resorted to many honourable expedients for killing time. He was lieutenant in a rifle corps, Vice-President of a Society of Postage-stamp Collectors, and Secretary to a Soup Club. He was constantly busy about work which might well have been left undone; and, in discharge of imaginary duties, he saddled himself with an amount of correspondence which would have appalled a solicitor. He spent quite £50 a year in stamping letters.

In taking a wife, he had cherished the unavowed purpose of increasing his tasks, by

giving hospitality to the numbers of persons with whom he was—to use his own term—“officially” connected—*e. g.* his brother officers in the rifle corps, his fellow-committee-men of the Soup Club, and the various ladies and gentlemen who collected stamps under his auspices. As to these last, he rather hoped to become President of the Stampers, and to have the meetings of the club held at his house every week, coincidentally with a dinner and a party. As soon as his honeymoon was over, he said fondly to his young wife: “My darling, I want you to manage a nice little dinner for twelve every Thursday evening. The President of our Stamp Club is getting beyond his work; if we feed the members of the Board well, I dare say they will promote me to his chair next election-day.”

“You shall have nothing to complain of, love,” answered Barbara, dutifully; and the fact is, that she so schooled her cook, that her husband’s Thursday dinners soon became things that were talked about reverently by all who were lucky enough to get invited to them.

Barbara Jerring spent a good deal of her time studying the divers cookery-books that

have been published since the days of Mrs. Glasse, and she was an expert connoisseur in the science of roasting and boiling. A pretty woman withal ; always well dressed and smooth-tempered, she had nothing in her appearance or manner that suggested an addiction to menial pursuits ; and, though visitors might call at a moment when she was anxiously engaged in rolling the paste for a pudding, they saw no traces of flour on her hands when she flowed into the drawing-room, all spruce and smiling. She therefore passed as the model of a housewife, and her husband thought her such. To be sure, the tradesmen's bills that he had to pay after he had been married three months seemed to him a little stiff ; but then how well he had breakfasted, lunched, and dined in the meanwhile ! Even to the five o'clock teas which Mrs. Jerring inaugurated, and to the little "snacks" in which she indulged before going to bed—everything was perfect. Being of a somewhat dyspeptic habit himself, Peter Jerring had never fairly appreciated food of any sort until he had become a married man ; but Barbara charmed his appetite, as it were. Her dainty side-dishes would have tempted a

monk out of his vows of abstinence on a fast-day ; and what with her excellently-buttered muffins of a morning, her *entrées* at noon, her tea-cakes at five, her *salmis* and *suprêmes* at dinner, her *consommés* and salads at supper-time, Peter gradually became conscious that he was consuming far larger quantities of nourishment than were good for him. He had first one attack of indigestion, then another, and he lost his slimness of waist. As for Barbara she got plumper and plumper ; and what is worse, the increase in her girth was accompanied by a corresponding decrease in her intellectual vivacity, so that a time arrived when she seemed unable to talk about anything else but eating and drinking. If spoken to about family affairs she yawned, fidgeted, and answered in languid monosyllables ; but if her husband, licking his lips, said : “ My dear, that is a savoury smell of truffles coming up from the kitchen,” she would rouse herself like a charger at the sound of the trumpet, and hold forth on the divers methods of accommodating the vegetable-pearl of Périgord, till she reminded one of a Methodist deaconess preaching on an inspired theme from a tub-top.

Now, this was all very well; but a man requires something more in a wife than that she should be able to expatiate on the art of dishing-up food. Peter, for instance, having won the good graces of the Stamp Club by his Thursday entertainments, was growing anxious about his election to the Presidency, and devoted many arduous hours to the compilation of a memoir which was to be read at the next quarterly meeting of the Club, and which treated of that exhaustive subject, "The growing scarcity of three-cornered Cape of Good Hope stamps." He had some reason to expect that his wife would take some interest in this composition which was to set the seal to his fame; but so far from doing so, Barbara, being one day in want of paper to cut frills for some cutlets, carelessly abstracted the manuscript from his study, and clipped it with her scissors. "I couldn't find any clean paper, dear," said she, artlessly, when caught by her husband in the very act; "but as we are dining alone, paper that has been written on won't much matter, you know."

"Won't matter?" roared Peter, his first shock of faintness culminating in furious wrath.

“Why, it’s the labour of three months you are destroying in that fashion !”

“Oh, you can write the essay again ; you are so clever,” said Barbara, sweetly.

Peter was not appeased. This was his first conjugal tiff, and the accumulated bitterness of many months now burst from his lips. “I have much to complain of in you, Barbara,” he cried excitedly ; “I saw you at the pastry-cook’s again to-day at noon.”

“Why, but I go there every day,” she answered innocently.

“You go there to eat ices and sponge-cakes at noon, when you lunch here at one ! Are you utterly insatiable, then ?”

“I don’t know what that long word means, Peter ; but it seems to me that I have every right to eat ices if they agree with me.” Thus spoke Mrs. Jerring.

“Ah, and I dare say you think yourself entitled to consume sandwiches and buns towards three in the afternoon, when you are going to take tea here at five ?”

“Perfectly. Why not ?”

“And to carry home bags of sweetmeats which you eat in the middle of the night when

you awake. I caught you at that game last night."

"Well, it's your fault if I wake up in the night—you snore so terribly!"

"Better and better! Be saucy now," retorted Peter indignantly. "But pray tell me, now, where the money is to come from for all your gluttonous orgies?"

"From your pockets, I suppose," answered Barbara drily; for her dander was up by this time, and she spoke with the spirit befitting an outraged wife. Her retort, however, only exasperated her husband.

"I'll put you on short commons," shouted he. "We'll dine off plain roast and boiled with a pudding, like others of our station; and you shan't see an *entrée* except on Sundays. As for truffles——"

He stopped short, for Barbara had cowered under the unmanly threat, and was shedding bitter tears. One is sorry to add that the consequences of Peter Jerring's roughness did not end here, for Barbara's heart and stomach were such tender allies that any attack on the latter wrung all the chords of the former, doing deadly injury. At dinner that evening, the aggrieved

wife's eyes being all swollen with weeping, she could eat nothing. She sat looking mournfully at soup, fish, and *entrées*, but when the roast came on the sight was too much for her, and she fell down in a swoon. Alas! that swoon was apoplexy; and when the doctor arrived post-haste, he could only certify that poor Mrs. Jerring was dead.

One may imagine the awful self-upbraidings of her husband!

* * * * *

He took his bereavement, indeed, so much to heart that he forthwith resigned his vice-presidency of the Stamp Club and his secretaryship of the Soup Committee. How could he bear to talk of stamps or to think of soup, remembering all that had passed at his last interview with Barbara? He abandoned himself to preparation; for his wife's funeral; and by way of rendering a graceful homage to the poor departed one's proclivities, he resolved that all friends who attended that sad ceremony should be regaled with a stand-up luncheon.

Speaking to his cook in the mortuary chamber, Peter Jerring discussed the arrange-

ments for this banquet in a tone of suitable gloom.

"We must have *foie-gras* sandwiches. She dearly loved those, and so do I," said he, sadly.

"Shall I put much mustard in them, sir?" asked the cook.

"I suppose so; isn't it usual?"

"Well, poor missis never let me do so, sir. She said it wasn't the thing. However, there's room for two opinions about that."

"Ah, well, it's I who rule now, so we'll have mustard," said Peter Jerring.

"Never!" cried an emphatic voice, that seemed to come from the nether world, and poor Barbara, wrapped in her shroud, sat bolt upright in her coffin. She had only been in a catalepsy, and the heresy of mustard with *foie-gras* had given her a shock which brought back life. "Never, never," repeated she, with flashing eyes; "and mind, an ordinary loaf won't do for these sandwiches, you must have new French rolls."

"My darling!" ejaculated the penitent husband, overcome with emotion, and he dropped on his knees; but at the same time he did not

forget to turn to the cook and say : “ Bring up a snack, your mistress must be hungry ! ”

Since then he has abandoned himself to his fate. He and his wife are getting to be the fattest couple in these isles.

XI.

THE SHOPLIFTER.

WE all of us keep a debtor and creditor account with fortune, and it would seem as if a certain sum in troubles and small worries were due from everybody to this capricious mistress. Some are taxed more heavily than others, and the modes of assessment vary, for while certain people pay their dues in regular instalments from month to month and day to day, others are suffered to get into long arrears and appear to clear off their liabilities in one big lump sum, which is demanded of them when they least expect it. In this last category stood Mr. Thomas Pottridge, of Smallborough.

This gentleman had been renowned in his native town for his constant run of luck. Whatever he put his hand to succeeded. If he invested in foreign loans, some instinct always warned him to sell out his scrip before the

State to which he had lent his money became bankrupt; and if he bought tickets in a Continental lottery or shares in one of those municipal loans which issue debenture bonds with premium, he was well-nigh certain to draw a big prize, and make all his friends envious. Having started in life as a chandler on a very small scale, he had quickly become a prosperous vendor of colonial produce; and, at the age of forty, was reckoned the "warmest" man in Smallborough—an alderman who had been twice mayor of his city, a churchwarden, and a very popular character among the fair sex by reason of his being a bachelor. One or two things more only were wanted to complete his happiness—namely, a good wife, a nice little estate in the country, and the honour of knighthood. Mr. Pottridge wished to become Sir Thomas Pottridge. Having long cherished this idea, and resolved, indeed, that he would not propose for the hand of pretty Miss Lucy Dott, the banker's daughter, until he could make her a ladyship, Mr. Pottridge ended by thinking that he could best secure his object by causing himself to be re-elected mayor, and arranging if possible that her Majesty the Queen or H.R.H.

the Prince of Wales should pay a visit to Smallborough during the term of his office. Intent upon this scheme, Mr. Pottridge came up to town to call upon Lord Beaconsfield. It was, of course, necessary that he should keep his plans secret from his fellow-townsmen, for there were other aldermen besides himself who would have been happy to accept knighthood; and in particular Mr. Bungs, the Brewer, who was next in rotation for the chair, but would not have cared much to serve as mayor unless there were anything to gain by so doing. Accordingly, Mr. Pottridge presented himself before the Prime Minister alone, and pledged his townsmen to give Royalty a grand reception without having received any authority from them to be so generous with the ratepayers' money. Lord Beaconsfield hearkened kindly to the grocer's prayer. Smallborough had lately returned a Tory to Parliament after a fiercely-contested election, and it was desirable to entertain Ministerial sentiments in the constituency by bringing the sunshine of Royal favour to play upon it; besides, as Mr. Pottridge pointed out, Smallborough was about to inaugurate some public baths and wash-houses, the first

establishment of the kind ever seen in the town, and nothing could be more suitable than that the Sovereign, or the Heir to the Throne, should preside over the ceremonial of opening a building which was to confer so many benefits upon the inhabitants. "Truly," said the Premier politely, when he had heard the alderman speak, "the cleanliness of the people must always be a matter of interesting concern to those who are brought into relations with them. I shall be happy to take her Majesty's commands on the—ahem!—public-spirited proposal which you have laid before me."

"If the Queen can't come, the Prince will do instead," said Mr. Pottridge rather eagerly; "and if you can manage it, my lord, I should be glad if the Royal visit could take place some time after the 9th of November next, for I shall be mayor then, and able to see that the reception given is a proper one."

"Ah, quite so!" answered Lord Beaconsfield, dropping his eyeglass, for he had studied Mr. Pottridge through it, and knew the man by heart, and thereupon he nodded to Smallborough's alderman, who backed out smirking, for he did not feel quite sure whether the correct thing

to do was to wink at the Premier or to shake hands with him.

Anyhow, he was in luck again, and he walked out of Downing-street as lightly as if Whitehall were paved with spring-boards. In asking that the Royal visit might take place after November he had had his eye on the mayoralty elections, which were held in October; and his plan was now to return to Smallborough, and tell his friend Bungs not to bother himself about accepting the chief magistracy during the coming twelvemonth. He happened to know that Bungs, who was about to enlarge his brewery premises, would be glad to wait another year before donning the gold chain — provided, of course, the matter of the Royal visit was kept dark. All this was not very ingenuous, but then, as above said, our alderman wanted to make a lady of Miss Dott, and a little strategy was excusable in compassing so gallant an object. As for Bungs, he could become a knight by-and-by, if he wished it, by improving his bitter beer.

Leaving Whitehall, Mr. Pottridge sauntered towards Regent-street, and as he walked along life seemed rosy to him because of Miss Dott.

He began to stare into the shop-windows, admiring pretty things which he was tempted to buy for his love. Here was a jeweller's with its wealth of trinkets, offering a choice to the tastes of blonde or brunette; then an upholsterer's, with an assortment of bright satin chairs, suggesting thoughts of a house nicely furnished, in view of bringing home a bride; then a silk-mercier's, and here Mr. Pottridge gazed a long time, for there were so many attractive things in the window that he could not help musing whether Miss Dott would take it kindly if he bought her a fine piece of sky-blue Lyons silk, with a boxful of straw-coloured gloves and a few other such trifles?

He was turning over this fancy, and fumbling wistfully at the pocket where his cheque-book lay, when suddenly he beheld through the window a curious sight. An elegantly-dressed lady was seated at the counter examining pieces of Brussels lace. The shopman averted his head for an instant, and she deftly whipped up a yard of the costly texture and transferred it to her pocket. The shopman spread over the counter a number of square flat boxes containing cambric handkerchiefs, and once more

turned away. Again the lady's deft hand went to work, and a couple of handkerchiefs found their way under her cloak. "Now that woman must have capacious pockets," soliloquised the astonished Mr. Pottridge. "She's a cunning thief, anyhow, and I'll just step in and warn the firm."

He hesitated a moment, and whilst he hovered about the doorway the lady came out escorted by an obsequious commissioner with medals on his breast. A footman, one of a row basking on a bench like oysters, rose and signalled to the coachman of a handsomely-appointed brougham, who at once drove forward. Evidently this lady was not an ordinary thief. She was a tall, dark person of about thirty, superbly dressed, and very handsome. Perceiving Mr. Pottridge, and seeing his glance fixed on her as she waited for her carriage, she eyed him with aristocratic superciliousness, and thereby settled her fate, for Smallborough's alderman, who could not brook the disdain of a shoplifter, hurried into the mercer's and explained what had happened, speaking in so excited a voice that a number of customers heard him.

Great commotion was caused by his announcement, and the shopman who had served her was quickly fired by the idea that he had let himself be outwitted. Darting out of the shop, he accosted the thief as she was stepping into her carriage, and said: "Will you come back, if you please? There is some mistake."

"What mistake?" asked she, turning round with a flash in her eyes. But she grew ashy pale.

"Come back, please," repeated the shopman, a pushing young man, whose voice broke from emotion.

A small crowd had already collected, and the lady was obliged to retrace her steps; but as she was about to enter the shop she slipped her hand into her pocket, and let a piece of lace fall on to the pavement. "No, ma'am, that won't do," cried Mr. Pottridge, seizing the thief's wrist. "You're going to pretend those things fell by accident into the folds of your dress; we know that trick." And, officiously acting as searcher, he plunged his hand into the pocket, despite the lady's struggles, and drew out a second piece of lace, three cambric handkerchiefs, two pairs of new gloves, one pair of silk stockings, and a lady's silk cravat. "Well,

I never!" exclaimed the pushing shopman, and there was a murmur among the bystanders, including the lady's own footman, who looked like a powdered figure of consternation.

"How dare you?" screamed the lady, purple with rage and mortification, as she glared at Mr. Pottridge. "I'll prosecute you for assault. I told the shopman here that I meant to buy these things. Let the bill be sent to my address; I'm Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane."

"Ah, I dessay," responded the shopman, "but I'm just going to give you into custody;" and running to the door, he beckoned to a blue-coated member of the force.

One of the partners of the firm, a gray, civil-spoken man, who had been summoned from his study, now came forward; and he was at first disposed to rebuke the haste of his shopman, but it was too late. The policeman had already entered, and all the shopmen and shop-girls, the customers, and the desultory people crowding round the door, were instant in chorus-sing that the thief should be made an example of. Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane, seeing public opinion so dead against her, uttered a howl, and fell swooning on the floor.

“Never mind that, we’ll soon rouse her,” said the policeman facetiously, for he did not yet know that he had to deal with a lady who kept a brougham. “The magistrate is sitting now at Marlborough-street ; we’ll just go there at once and have her charged.”

This arrangement was acceded to, and in a few minutes the lady and the policeman (who had got abashed by this time from finding himself seated on the silk cushions of a carriage) were riding to the police-court in Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane’s own vehicle, while Mr. Pottridge, the shopman, and the mercer followed on foot to give evidence.

* * * * *

One would think that in a case where the offence was flagrant and the testimony so clear, the magistrate might have sentenced the defendant straight off to six months’ imprisonment ; and, indeed, had the thief been a person of the lower orders, it would probably have been her fate to be convicted summarily. But it turned out that Pounceforth-Keane was the real name of the elegant shoplifter, whose husband was a person moving, as reporters say, “in the best ranks of society.” Mr. Pounceforth-Keane was

sent for, and arrived breathless in a hansom from one of the best clubs in Pall-mall. At the sight of him his wife, who had been locked up for an hour in a police-cell, wept profusely, and Mr. P.-K. was himself much agitated. He asked for a remand, and tendered bail, saying he should produce medical evidence to the effect that his wife had lately suffered severely in health. The magistrate—a timid man, who had grown-up daughters to marry, and was terribly afraid of Society—stammered out something like an apology, and readily acceded to the application for bail. So very soon Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane tottered out of court, weeping like a victim, on her husband's arm; and Mr. Pott-ridge walked away with the shopman and the civil-spoken mercer. All three were crestfallen, as if they had committed a blunder. "This will be a very bad affair for me," grumbled the mercer. "I would have lost a hundred yards of lace sooner than appear in court against a lady like this."

"Well, but she's a thief," cried Mr. Pott-ridge, rousing himself, and speaking with spirit. "What harm can she or her friends do you?"

"Are you quite sure you saw her steal the

things ? ” asked the mercer gloomily. “ Besides, supposing she did put them into her pocket, she says that she told my shopman to send her the bill.”

“ I’m hanged if she did ! ” ejaculated the shopman indignantly.

“ Silence, sir ! ” answered the mercer with a stern frown. “ If this be really a case of theft, you are self-condemned, for you ought to have kept your eyes about you. For some time past I have noticed that you have been very negligent in business.”

The shopman collapsed ; as for Mr. Pottridge, he trudged back to his hotel, feeling half inclined to go and ask Lord Beaconsfield what he ought to do. The case had been adjourned for a week, so he travelled back to Smallborough in the evening, and by the time he reached his native town he had worked himself up into a state of contempt for the mercer and the metropolitan stipendiary, who seemed to draw a distinction between well-dressed and ill-dressed plunderers. Meeting Mr. Bungs, the brewer, near the railway-station, he gave him an account of what had happened, and was hearkened to with sympathy until he mentioned the name of Pounceforth-

Keane; then Mr. Bungs pursed up his lips. "Why, bless me, that's the cousin of Lord Keynsole, brother-in-law of our Lord Lieutenant!"

"What difference does that make?" stammered Mr. Pottridge, like a man who feels less sure of his ground.

"Oh, nothing, except that I don't see why a lady of that sort should commit robberies," responded Mr. Bungs.

Further down the street Mr. Pottridge, who was rubbing his pate in rather violent perplexity, encountered Mr. Dott, the banker, whose daughter Lucy he loved. "Pounceforth-Keane!" exclaimed Mr. Dott, as soon as he had heard the grocer's story. "Why, Lord Keynsole, his cousin, banks with us."

"Well, but come, Dott," retorted Mr. Pottridge impatiently, "is that a reason why Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane shouldn't be a dishonest jade?"

"No, but I think the whole thing improbable," answered the banker, "and I confess I should be sorry if anything unpleasant happened to Lord Keynsole's family."

Mr. Pottridge was not in a very good humour

when he went to bed that night. A magistrate himself, he knew what shifts are often made to withdraw well-connected offenders from justice, and so far as he was concerned he would have cared little had an appeal been made to him, *ad misericordiam*, to acknowledge that he had, perhaps, been mistaken in fancying that he saw Mrs. P.-K. pocket some lace and handkerchiefs. But Mr. Pottridge could not bear to be pooh-poohed at or threatened with unpleasant consequences if he did his duty. He was an alderman, a grocer with a blameless conscience, and he feared no man. Feeling that his character for veracity and common-sense was at stake, he resolved to give his evidence against the wife of Lord Keynsole's cousin with no more hesitation than if she were the commonest gaol-bird.

From that date, however, things began to go wrong somehow with Mr. Pottridge. It seemed as though his long luck had forsaken him. On the morrow of his adventure in London, Mr. Chuckleworth, the principal solicitor in the town, who was Lord Keynsole's legal adviser, passed him in the street without nodding; and later in the day Mrs. C. sent a stiff note begging that Mr. Pottridge would send in his bill, and

intimating that she would thenceforth purchase her groceries at another house. Now the Chuckleworths had always been excellent customers of Mr. Pottridge.

This was bad enough, but worse was to follow. Next day some inspectors of weights and measures arrived at the alderman's shop and found a piece of lard sticking under his scales. They declared they should make a report of the fact. Scarcely had they gone, leaving the grocer speechless with confusion, than two well-dressed strangers entered and bought some tea, brown sugar, cocoa, pepper, and a pot of mustard ; after which they stated that they were public analysts, who were going to examine the quality of these goods. They examined them, in truth, so fast, that two days later Mr. Pottridge received a summons to answer a charge of putting birch-twigs in his tea, sand in his sugar, turmeric in his mustard, clay in his cocoa, &c. Mr. Pottridge shrugged his shoulders at first, taking it for granted that the charge would be dismissed by his brother magistrates, Messrs. Dott, Bungs & Co. ; but before the case came on for hearing, it fortuitously transpired that Mr. Pottridge had been up to London interviewing Lord

Beaconsfield for the purposes we know, and this made the other aldermen furious. Mr. Bung, the brewer, was particularly angry, and declared that Pottridge was a traitor, insomuch that the poor grocer, instead of having a friendly Bench to judge him, found a very stern one.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Pottridge," said Mr. Dott, who sat as chairman, "but men in your position should set an example. You are fined £20 on each count, with costs. Total, £120."

Ill-starred Pottridge ! He left the court politically and socially done for, for he could no longer hope to be re-elected mayor nor to marry Miss Dott. He should have, moreover, to resign his aldermanship, and his personal character, as well as that of his tea, sugar, and mustard, was ruined.

So ruined was Mr. Pottridge that when he went to London to give evidence against Mrs. Pounceforth - Keane, the first question asked him by the counsel for the defence—a blustering Old Bailey barrister—was : "I believe you have just been convicted of selling adulterated goods and at false weight ?"

"Let me explain," stammered poor Pottridge.

"No explanations, sir. Give me a plain answer, yes or no !"

“Yes, then.”

“Well, then, if you are liable to make mistakes about your weights, you may err in other things.”

“Perhaps,” replied the grocer desperately, “I may have been mistaken in thinking this lady was a thief. I have had enough bother about the business.”

“You ought to be ashamed of your flippant conduct, sir,” cried the counsel harshly, and the wretched grocer hobbled out of the witness-box feeling very mean indeed. After this confession of possible error on the part of the chief witness the case against Mrs. Pounceforth-Keane was, of course, dismissed, and Mr. Pottridge slunk out of Court with a magisterial reprimand ringing in his ears. To conclude this little story one has only to add that when H.R.H. the Prince of Wales graciously went to open the baths of Smallborough it was Mr. Bungs who was mayor, and eventually got knighted ; while Mr. Pott-ridge was not even invited to the dinner at the town-hall, whereof he paid his share like the other ratepayers.

He is no longer regarded as a lucky man.

XII.

OLD BARBLE'S HOUSE.

"PETER, my boy," said old Uncle Barble, "when I die, I leave you this house of mine. You'll find it a snug place to retire to when you give up business."

Snug, indeed; for Uncle Barble's house was situated on the esplanade of W.-on-the-Sea. It boasted a commanding view of the ocean, a carriage-sweep in front, and a fine garden behind. It was a house which had always conferred on its owner some prestige in W——, for folks wondered why old Barble should have kept such a large mansion and grounds for his own use, when he might have cleared so much money by selling them to promoters of hotel companies, who had made many a bid for what was regarded as the finest site in W——. However, old Barble had always said: "My nephew Peter shall sell the house if he pleases;

as for me, I like to feel that I am living in the finest house of our city. In one way and another, this house has been the making of me; and, please the pigs, it'll be the making of Peter."

It seems that the pigs were pleased that Peter should be made; for one day of woe old Barble died, and his nephew became heir to a tidy sum of money, along with the house at W—— aforementioned. Mr. Peter Mickins was a briefless barrister of about forty, who was very ambitious of getting on in the world. He had tried his hands and feet at climbing a number of those ladders which are supposed to lead to social eminence quicker than if you take the roundabout road of patience. He had edited a newspaper, had written some political pamphlets, and had acted as secretary to two or three of those companies which appear to spend most of their shareholders' money in advertising. He was also a constant and fluent spouter at public meetings. In fact, Mickins was not at all an uncommon sort of fellow. By perseveringly vapouring forth the platitudes of all the crazes most in fashion, he had earned quite a nice little reputation as a man of science,

a philanthropist, and a politician. But all this would not have done much for him in the long run, if it had not been for that most timely and fortunate legacy which Mickins came in for of old Barble's house.

There is a story of a man who, paying a tax for his donkey, became thereby an elector; he lost his donkey and his vote too, so that he had some ground for maintaining that it was the donkey and not he who was privileged to help in returning a Member to Parliament. Even as it was with this man's donkey, so it was with Peter Mickins' house. That dwelling endowed him with importance. It gave him rank among the big-wigs of W——, and lent colour to the supposition that he was much better off than he pretended to be. As rivers flow to the sea, good luck pours upon the man who has become independent of fortune; and so now Peter Mickins found that it would not be difficult for him to get elected a town-councillor for W——, and afterwards become Member of Parliament for the borough. Indeed, the Ven. Mr. Noser, who was Archdeacon of W——, and so active a character in the borough that he had been nicknamed the Grand

Elector, said to Mickins with a sort of pious wink, as he pocketed a substantial cheque which his new parishioner had handed to him in aid of some church school funds : " You leave your candidature in my hands, Mickins. Just allow me to nurse the borough for you a couple of years, and you'll see."

Now, the Ven. Mr. Noser did not make such promises as these without meaning to keep them, for he was a discreet Archdeacon, and so Peter Mickins began to feel wondrously elated by the career of glory which was opening before him. As for Mrs. Mickins, a slim and simpering lady, corroded by the ambition of "shining in society," she could not have taken more pleasure in her new mansion if it had been situated in the Elysian fields. She was always being complimented on its size and beauty. She gave lawn-tennis in its garden, and found that any number of nice people were willing to accept her invitations. Other nice people would call and sit for whole hours on her balcony when the weather was fine, admiring the view of the sea. During the first season which the Mickinses spent in W——, their abode became a house of call for all those

fascinating persons who like to enjoy themselves gratuitously at the expense of their richer neighbours. Mickins and his wife never wanted for guests to help them eat their beef and empty bottles out of the cellar which old Barble had so judiciously stocked. On their side the guests did something for Peter Mickins, who was elected a member of a local club, and received invitations from several of the county gentry to come with his wife and spend a few days at their halls and parks during the hunting season.

Alas! Mickins accepted the invitation to go a-hunting, and it is owing to this circumstance that he is not now sitting in Parliament. The mere fact of having consented to ride to hounds on a horse eighteen hands high marred as fine a legislative career as could have fallen to the lot of any Briton. Mickins set his horse at a ditch, and was hurled on the top of his hat into a field of hard stubble. As his head happened to be inside his hat, concussion of the brain resulted, and poor Peter was carried back to his host's house in the saddest plight possible. It was all the doctors could do to save him, and even when they had done their best Mickins looked

but a sorry object, the ghost of his former self. However, as soon as he was fit to be moved, his wife took him back to their pleasant home at W——, and here Mickins was gratified with some payment for his great hospitalities under the form of kindness from many friends. The Ven. Archdeacon Noser was most unremitting in his visits. He called every day at luncheon time ; and his grave, earnest voice was often heard talking politics and theology to his suffering host even up to the evening hour when dinner was served. Then, again, old Barble's house was filled daily with visitors, who helped Mrs. Mickins to comfort and amuse her poor husband, until it became evident to the doctors that the rapid progress of their patient's recovery would hurry him into a better world if they did not interfere. They accordingly ordered him to go and spend a year abroad, travelling by easy stages all over the Continent, and winding up with a visit to Egypt. Mickins languidly agreed, and left the arrangements for the journey in his wife's hands.

Now it was no sooner known that this lady and her husband were going abroad than agents

applied to them to know whether they would consent to let their house during their absence. Mrs. Mickins saw no objection to this course, which would help her to defray the expenses of her journey; and she merely stipulated that any tenants introduced to her should be perfectly respectable. One morning an agent called to say that he had received a most eligible offer from a Polish lady of rank, Countess Fulowitz, who was prepared to take the house for one year at a high rental. Mrs. Mickins consented; and started quite happy to think she had made a good bargain.

As she and her husband ensconced themselves in a first-class railway carriage, the Ven. Archdeacon Noser stood on the platform, and graciously waved them an adieu with his black kid gloves. "Good-bye, my worthy friend," he cried, with a soft gravity, to Mickins; "mind you come back to us in sound health, so that we may make a good fight with you at the elections." And he added a small joke in Latin: "*Vires acquirit cundo*. A man gathers strength by going to Egypt. Ha! Ha!!"

* * * * *

Like a giant refreshed with wine, so did

Peter Mickins return to W—— after a twelve months' voyage. He had tasted the vintages of many countries; he had been up the Rhine and down the Rhone; he had put his stick into the crater of Vesuvius, and had climbed, with the help of half-a-dozen negroes, to the top of the highest Pyramid. He came back game for anything.

The day after his return was a fine balmy one in August, and W—— was full of visitors. The Esplanade was crowded, and from his drawing-room window Peter Mickins looked down upon many familiar faces which he hoped would presently light up with glee at the sight of him. It struck him, though, that his friends had become rather short-sighted, for though he persistently bobbed his head and waved his hand out of the window, nobody appeared to notice him. "I suppose they don't expect me back so soon," he soliloquised; "yet I wrote to say I was coming. Ah, here's the dear old Archdeacon." And Mickins was on the point of crying, "Hi! Noser!" when his sense of what was due to a Church dignitary restrained him. He contented himself with waving his pocket-handkerchief, but the Archdeacon, though he glanced up at the window, strode on superbly unconscious.

Peter Mickins could not make out what this meant. He had quite counted on some public demonstration in honour of his return. He had expected that the Ven. Mr. Noser and the Mayor and Aldermen would all wait upon him together and offer their congratulations on his happy restoration to health. Troubled by a presentiment which he could not explain, he sought his head-dress and sallied forth on to the Esplanade. The very first person he encountered was the Mayor of W——, one Rinds, a prosperous cheesemonger, and a pillar of the Conservative party. Rinds lifted his hand to his hat, but it was not to remove it in a courteous salute; he clapped it determinedly on the top so as to impress it more firmly on his head, and throwing back his head with a haughty roll of his eye, he passed by his quondam friend Mickins. “Now what on earth does this mean?” exclaimed the latter. “Hallo, Rinds, don’t you know me?”

Rinds did not deign to turn round. Mickins wandered on like one stupefied and met two Aldermen of W——, the one a chemist, the other a pastry-cook. Both these dignitaries saw Mickins as plainly as it was possible to see a fellow-citizen; but not a word of greeting

escaped them. They frowned terribly, curled their lips, and would have passed on like Rinds, had not Mickins barred their progress by extending his arms.

"Come, what does this mean? Don't you know me, you two?" "No, sir, I don't know you," responded the chemist stiffly. "We have even forgotten your name, Mr. Mickins," chimed in the pastry-cook punctiliously, with some pomp of manner, and giving him the go-by, one to his right and the other to his left, the pair of Aldermen went on.

Peter Mickins's arms fell to his side. He could understand less than ever what was happening to him; but, fortunately, he descried the Archdeacon walking a little further on, and he hurried after him. "Archdeacon," he cried, breathless, so soon as he was within earshot; and he expected to see Mr. Noser turn round with his face all aglow from smiles, but the countenance which Mr. Noser turned upon Peter Mickins was one black with anger. "Sir, what do you want with me?" inquired the Archdeacon, much as if he were addressing a pick-pocket. "Why, I'm Mickins," stammered the owner of his name. "I wish to goodness you'd

tell me, Archdeacon, what is the meaning of this miserable reception which has been given me here. I came back expecting to find friends."

"That was singular presumption on your part, Mr. Mickins," was the Archdeacon's dry answer.

"Will you just explain those words?" retorted Mr. Mickins, whose eyes now kindled.

"I have nothing to explain," replied Mr. Noser.

"But you shall explain," bawled Peter Mickins; and he looked so furious as he clenched his fists that the Archdeacon grew a little frightened. Several people had stopped on the Parade to watch the interview between the two men. The Archdeacon, not wishing to become the centre of a mob, motioned to Mickins to come with him, and the pair walked along together till they came to a side street, where the Archdeacon branched off. "Mr. Mickins," he then said, with as much dignity as he could muster, "when people make money by such methods as you have been doing, they cannot hope for the esteem of honest men."

"I have always made my money by reputable methods," responded Mickins hotly, "and I dare you to prove the contrary." "Ah, this is too

much," shouted the Archdeacon, shaking his umbrella. "If you call it reputable to keep a public casino and gaming-house for the entertainment of sharpers and jades, I pity you." And turning majestically on his heel, he walked on. Mickins could get no further explanation from him.

He got none from anybody else, though he soon discovered, by conducting personal inquiries among people who were not his friends, that during his absence his precious tenant, the Countess Fulowitz, had converted his house into a rendezvous for all the loose characters in the district; and that, moreover, she had stated that Mr. Peter Mickins had given her full authority so to do. The very high rent which she paid seemed to corroborate this assertion, and poor Mickins found it in vain to struggle against appearances. He is noted to this day as a black sheep in W——, and he finds it impossible to let his house. Neither can he inhabit it himself. It stands empty and desolate, glanced at with little shivers of horror by all the pious persons in W——, among whom Archdeacon Noser is chief.

XIII.

THE SHEEP TURNED LION.

OF the forty boys who boarded at Mr. Jawe's house at Eton, there was not a milder youth than Simpkins, who reached the height of the Upper Division of the Fifth Form without distinguishing himself in any way. He was a tall, flaxen-haired lad, with long arms and legs, and an amiable but weak smile. He did nothing well, and yet nothing so ill as to attract remark. His place in "trials," or school examinations, was always low, but he had never "muffed"; and as it was with him in school-work, so was it in games, for he did not excel at cricket, football, or rowing. He could just swim; pull without catching crabs; bat without knocking his stumps down (though he was incapable of scoring); and at football he could play without appearing to "funk," though in truth he had respect for his shins, and would never willingly

charge into a "bully" where there were a good many loose kicks flying about. So in sum, poor Simpkins was a duffer; but on the other hand, he possessed such an exuberant imagination that he acutely felt the degradation in which he stood by reason of his general inferiorities. A physiognomist studying his countenance would have seen in it the signs of budding genius, and might have prophesied that Simpkins would become a poet, a novelist, or a wit. Meanwhile, the lad's imagination served chiefly to his self-glorification in private, for he was constantly picturing for his own delectation scenes in which he played the part of a boy hero. Now he was captain of the Eleven, and made such a score at Lord's as to win a victory against Harrow off his own bat; now he was captain of the boats and "stroked" the Eight at Henley, winning for his school the Grand Challenge Cup and the Ladies' Plate; or, again, Simpkins fancied himself plunging into competition for the Newcastle Scholarship and defeating all his rivals, as a preliminary to going up to Oxford and gaining double first-class honours. There was not a vision of fame that Simpkins did not conjure up; and the worst of it was that these dreams

haunted him by night as well as by day, so that now and then he would arise from bed deeply mortified at facing the realities of his humble position, and making the most valiant resolves that he would try and do better for the future.

It should be mentioned that Simpkins had this one point of superiority over most fellows in the school; he was a great authority on postage-stamps. He had amassed a collection of nearly three thousand different sorts, and used to make himself pleasant during the holidays by taking it about with him to tea-parties and showing it to young ladies. At Eton he was sometimes consulted by lower boys as to the genuineness of stamps which they had bought for their own collections; and occasionally Masters would joke with him about his supposed infallibility as to geography, and the dates when divers sovereigns had ascended the throne. As a matter of fact, Simpkins was not infallible; but he passed for being so, which is much the same thing, as his Holiness the Pope would say.

Thus, one evening at the beginning of a Michaelmas Term or Football Half, Simpkins, returning from the holidays, was greeted by his

tutor with an invitation to come to tea and exhibit his collection of stamps to a young lady who was a connoisseur. "It's a sister of my wife's," said Mr. Jawe; "she's quite as eager about stamps as you are, so you must mind and not let her coax any out of your collection. I warn you she is most clever at cajolery, so be careful."

"Bother the stamps," soliloquised Simpkins, who, like all hobbledehoys, thought it a proof of manliness to affect that he was bored by female society; but he went and put on his white tie and a stiff collar, and presently made his appearance in the drawing-room with a folio album under his arm.

He was affably received by Miss Nelly Snubbin, his tutor's sister-in-law, who was a merry maiden of seventeen, and an attractive one to boot. Her enthusiasm about stamps may have been great, but it soon exhausted itself in conversation; for after tea, when Simpkins and she sat down in a corner on the pretence of having a good look at the big album, she began to talk about everything except stamps.

"How long have you been at Eton, Mr. Simpkins?"

"About—aw—five years, I think."

"Been often swished?"

"Wha-at?" Here Simpkins drew himself up a little, and reddening, looked daggers at his fair companion.

"Oh, I see I'm alluding to a tender subject. Never mind. You're in the Boats, I suppose? No? Then you're in the Eleven?"

"Only eleven fellows can be in the Eleven," observed Simpkins, still offended; "and there are above nine hundred of them in the school."

"Nine hundred elevens, do you mean? Oh! you're talking of fellows. Why don't you have the sense to call yourselves boys? We at our schools used to call ourselves girls; but I suppose you go in for grand expressions at Eton. I say, Mr. Simpkins, are you conceited?"

"What should I be conceited about?"

"That's what I was going to ask. Can you bat, boat, sing, dance, box, or tell stories better than other fellows? I see you think me an impertinent girl; but I do like a boy—or fellow, I beg pardon—to be able to do something better than everybody else. Just think, now; have you ever thrashed a fellow twice your size?"

“No-o: certainly not.”

“Why not?”

“Why? What a question! . . . Because I couldn’t, to be sure!” almost screamed Simpkins, who looked redder and more uncomfortable than ever.

“Supposing you were to try?”

“Try to thrash a fellow twice my size?”

“Yes, just to please me, and make me think you a hero.”

Nelly Snubbin gazed at him archly, whilst his eyes, which had become goggles, answered hers with a helpless stare; but immediately afterwards she burst out laughing, and Simpkins saw that he had been roasted. He arose with dignity, and closed his album, making the young lady a stiff bow. This was the means he took to indicate that he was no longer a boy, and disliked being treated as such.

The next day, when he met Miss Snubbin in the streets, and the day following that, and several days afterwards, he always bowed stiffly to her without condescending to meet her glance. On Sunday, in chapel, he encountered her eyes once, and she smothered a smile in her muff, which made him feel hot all over and dry in

the mouth. Simpkins had just reached the age of seventeen, when youths begin to attach importance to the sayings and doings of maidens; and, perhaps, in truth he was already longing to be a hero for the sake of Miss Snubbin, whom he loathed.

The season was autumn, and every day "after twelve"—*i. e.* between noon and two—the boys of the different houses went to play football. Simpkins execrated these games, which, so far as he was concerned, consisted of idly running about during an hour after a ball which he seldom touched. He used to play for the propriety of the thing, just to set an example to the Lower Boys, and because he could not help himself, but he had never been known to make a goal or a rouge except by flukes.

Now, a day or two after Miss Snubbin had laughed at him in chapel, Simpkins, attired in a flannel shirt and cap, was hobbling about the playing-field, playing as usual in the simplest way. The game had lasted half-an-hour, and the side against Simpkins had scored three goals and a rouge to nothing. The resistance was indeed so feeble, that the captain of that other side, one Bullonley, a hulking lout, cried out

impatiently : “ Come on, you fellows ; do something to make the game brisk.”

At ordinary times, Simpkins would have been the last fellow to respond to this challenge ; but suddenly he was observed to charge at the ball as if he wished to annihilate it. He kicked it too far for “ bullying ” ; and, though he followed it up as fast as he could run, he was not in time to prevent Bullonley, who was “ flying-man ” on the other side, from giving it a drop-kick on the bound. But Simpkins, without checking his pace, gave a leap, stopped the ball with his hands, and when it had fallen to earth, made such a mad rush at Bullonley that this worthy—who no more expected the shock than an ox does an assault from a sheep—was carried clean off his legs, and measured his length on the sward. He scrambled up discomfited, but was too late to save the goal, for Simpkins, scurrying along like a runaway colt, had dodged the two “ behinds,” and bullied the ball clean through the sticks.

“ Well played, Simpkins,” cheered the astonished players on both sides in a chorus ; and a tinkling laugh added its melody to their shouts like a bell in an orchestra.

The laugh came from Miss Nelly Snubbin. She it was who, arriving on the ground with her sister in the midst of the game, had abruptly fired the soul of Simpkins with martial ardour, and turned the tide of the play. But Bullonley had seen Miss Snubbin too, and he felt mortified at having been rolled over on the grass under her eyes. He resolved that there should be no repetition of this disgrace; and after the "kick-off," he started in pursuit of the ball like a young lion let loose. He ran so fast, however, that he shot past the ball, and it got bullied back by some other fellows (for play had freshened now all over the field) right back to his rouge line. Bullonley turned, saw that Simpkins had got the ball, and bore down upon him. This time it was poor Simpkins who bit the dust; but it so happened that he fell behind the line with the ball under him, and, touching it, he claimed a rouge.

Bullonley was furious. A "bully" was formed outside the goal, and he went down "post" on purpose to bear the brunt of the fray and to check further enterprises on the part of the presumptuous Simpkins.

Now, in an Eton bully it is the "post" who

holds the ball between his feet, supported by all the players on his side; while those on the other endeavour by main force to "rouge" the ball between the goal-sticks. A strong, cool-tempered post trusts to his own strength to force the ball out of the bully and to pass it on to one of his "corners," who will kick it far afield; but a hot-tempered "post" kicks, and this is what Bullonley proceeded to do.

He kicked Simpkins fiercely two or three times on the shins, and made this poor youth wince and tremble all over from pain; but Simpkins had the courage to stick to his ball, with this result—that Bullonley succumbed to a sudden rush that was made whilst one of his feet was raised, and bringing down all his own side in his collapse, was the cause of another goal being scored.

This made two goals to Simpkins, who was uproariously cheered; but now a new thing happened, for when the "bully" had dispersed, Simpkins, livid with pain and excitement, strode up to Bullonley and said: "You shinned me several times over just now, Bullonley. Did you do it on purpose?"

"What if I did?" asked the other, amazed

as a mastiff might be at getting called to book by an Italian greyhound.

“Well, if you did, you’re a cad,” answered Simpkins. “Take that!” and he dealt Bullonley a wild right-hander on the nose.

“Confound you!” roared Bullonley, and he struck out at his assailant with both fists; but already blood was gushing from his face, and some had got into his eyes and was blinding him.

Simpkins took desperate advantage of this to administer three “slashers” in succession, one on each eye and a third on the bread-basket.

The unfortunate Bullonley staggered like a drunken man, and from that time Simpkins had him at his mercy. But “mercy” is an inappropriate term, for a sheep who by chance can work his wicked will on an ox is not merciful; and Simpkins had now to wipe out, by one resolute display of savagery, five years of utter tameness.

His schoolfellows stared at him in consternation, but all the same cheered with frenzy to see the weak beat the strong. It was like a revolution in which some paltry workman beards

a king, and no one thought of stopping the fight. Bullonley found not a friend, and the punishment he got during a couple of helpless minutes was awful. Down he fell at length all of a lump, stunned and sick; and then Mrs. Jawe and her sister, breaking into the ring, called upon Simpkins in trembling accents to desist.

Simpkins had reaped but a single black eye in the encounter, and he looked fairly fresh. Touching his cap to the ladies, he said in a cool voice to some lower boys: "Take that fellow to Tutor's, some of you; and now we'll go on with the game."

But saying this, he did not vouchsafe a glance to Miss Snubbin.

Of course, during the rest of the game none durst withstand the victorious Simpkins, and he made as many goals and rouges as he pleased.

* * * * *

Success often comes to the confident, and Simpkins, having once got knowledge of his own strength, was enabled to give full career

to his ambition, and to achieve success beyond his wildest dreams.

He got into the school Football Eleven that half, and in the next summer half became one of the Eight, and rowed at Henley. Miss Nelly Snubbin happened to meet him just as he was leaving his boat, which had won the Ladies' Plate.

"Well done, Mr. Simpkins!" she cried, clapping her hands.

"Well done, Miss Snubbin," he answered, in a whisper. "I think I owe a good deal of this to you, don't I?"

And when their glances met this time it was the girl who blushed.

THE END.

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